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## CHAPTER I

### MISS DAMPIER

"AND here is Inspector Frost," said the Chief.

I bowed to a lady who had risen from her chair as I entered. She was plump and somewhat over forty, and stood upright in very serviceable shoes. Her dress was plain but beautifully cut, and she had an air of assurance about her that was impressive. She gave me an appraising glance through her rimless glasses, and as her chin was sharply tilted I felt that she was looking down upon me. The straight line of her closed lips betokened one accustomed to command; but I didn't like her assumption of superiority, and I was at once aware that she was disappointed in me. She had probably expected to see a Sherlock Holmes, and instead she saw a man weighing sixteen stone, who has been described by Harry Holloway in the *Daily Intelligence* as looking like a jovial publican. I can't help my appearance,



and I did not much mind if the lady took me for a fool. Many criminals have done that, but they have generally discovered that I delivered the goods all right—the contemptuous criminals with the darbies on.

“Miss Dampier,” the Chief went on, “has called here on a puzzling matter. Lady Dorothy Poynings has disappeared.”

I nodded.

“Lady Dorothy Poynings, I understand, has a school in Blankshire—a very successful school. It is at Poynings Hall, the seat of the late Earl of Castlekerry. Miss Dampier is the senior assistant. That is right? Isn’t it?”

Miss Dampier bowed.

“Lady Dorothy and her secretary went to London on Saturday morning intending to do some shopping. They were expected to return by the afternoon train, and the car was ordered to meet them at Appleton Junction at half-past five. They did not come by that train or the next, and no word has been received to account for their absence. Miss Dampier was naturally very worried all Sunday, and when the post this morning brought no word of explanation, she very properly came here to ask for our advice.”

"I came here to ask you, to find Lady Dorothy," said Miss Dampier.

"Exactly," said the Chief. "I also understand that Miss Dampier is anxious to avoid any publicity."

"It would ruin the school."

"But all the girls must know," said I.

"They know nothing," said Miss Dampier. "I have explained to them and to the staff that Lady Dorothy is detained in town."

"How old is Lady Dorothy?"

"She is thirty-two."

"How long has she had this school?"

"For ten years. She opened it after the War."

"She was very young."

"She had me to assist her, and she could rely on my experience."

"You have known Lady Dorothy a long time?"

"Since she was a child. I was her governess."

"Poynings Hall, I suppose, belongs to the present Earl of Castlekerry."

"No! The last Earl died insolvent. Lady Dorothy bought the Hall and Park when the estate was sold."

"It is, perhaps, mortgaged?"

"I don't see what these questions can have to do with Lady Dorothy's disappearance."

"You have no reason to suppose that she is in financial difficulties?"

"The school is very flourishing. It is quite full and the fees are high."

"Have you a photograph of Lady Dorothy?"

"Not here."

"What is she like?"

"She is tall and slight. She has bright red hair and very blue eyes. Her nose is *retroussé*, her chin somewhat pointed, and she has a few freckles."

"Is she Irish?"

"Yes, on both sides."

"Irresponsible and unexpected."

"I trained her, and she has proved a successful head mistress."

"And her secretary, who is also missing, is——?"

"Miss Le Fanu."

"What about her?"

"I know nothing about Miss Le Fanu. Lady Dorothy engaged her at the beginning of this term."

"Have you acquainted her relatives with the fact that she has disappeared?"

"I have told you, I know nothing of Miss Le Fanu, or who her relatives may be. She was Lady Dorothy's secretary, and not a member of the school staff."

"Still you must have seen something of her. She was living, I suppose, in the same house with you. Was she competent?"

"I suppose so. She seemed to satisfy Lady Dorothy, but I did not see much of her. She gave me no information about herself, and I am not curious."

"What is she like to look at? Is she young?"

"Yes."

"And pretty?"

"Some men might think her so. She is dark and rather small."

"Well, the ladies went to town, you say, on Saturday morning. By what train?"

"The eight-thirty from Appleton Junction, which arrives at Paddington at nine fifty-five. I came up by it myself this morning."

"How were they dressed?"

"I don't know. I did not see them off."

"Had they any luggage?"

"I am told that Lady Dorothy took up to town a big cardboard box—a dressmaker's box. I believe she was going to visit her dressmaker."

"Who is her dressmaker?"

"I don't know."

"Had they any other luggage?"

"I expect Miss Le Fanu had an attaché case. Secretaries generally have."

"Has Lady Dorothy often missed trains?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"In fact her disappearance is altogether unaccountable?"

"If it had not been, I should not be here."

"Quite so—Lady Dorothy had, I suppose, a good many friends in town."

"Naturally."

"Have you inquired of any of them?"

"I called on Lady Brassingham in Hill Street this morning. Lady Brassingham is Lady Dorothy's aunt, but she knew nothing of her whereabouts."

"Had she expected Lady Dorothy to lunch on Saturday?"

"I did not inquire."

"You are going straight back to Poynings Hall?"

"By the twelve o'clock train. It is my duty, as I am in charge."

"I will be there this afternoon about half-past three."

"What is the good of that? Lady Dorothy is certainly not at Poynings."

"It is a wide world, Miss Dampier. At present I have no clue at all as to where the missing lady is. Perhaps I may find one at Poynings Hall."

"But there must be no publicity."

"I suppose I might turn up as a prospective parent."

Miss Dampier said nothing, but looked me up and down.

"New rich," I suggested; but her eyes almost closed with contempt.

"New, and very, very rich, Miss Dampier. You know that the most exclusive schools don't refuse rich girls."

"I only know one school, and it is exclusive."

"Still there is no harm in me as a prospective parent coming to see the school. You can refuse my daughter, of course, and boast afterwards of the tact with which you did it, but you can't refuse to show me over the place."

"I suppose not."

"Very well, I shall not be many days at Poynings before discovering where Lady Dorothy is to be looked for."

"You can't expect us to put you up."

"Is there a decent inn in the place?"

"The 'Fisherman's Arms'—the Duke of Bedminster stays there when he comes to see his daughter."

"I wonder if he is particular, but anyhow I must chance it. Is there any fishing to be had from the 'Fisherman's Arms'?"

"Yes."

"Then there is another reason why I should stay there. Splendid! You may expect me at half-past three, and should you hear from Lady Dorothy before then, you can ring us up. Telephone number Vic. 7000."

Miss Dampier was exceedingly chilly as she said farewell. When she had gone the Chief asked: "Why did you antagonise that woman?"

"I disliked her and she disliked me. She was not telling us all she knew—not by a long way."

"You hardly went about it in a manner that was likely to win her confidence."

"Tut! Miss Dampier had no intention of being confidential; but when she becomes angry she may also become so discreet that we can guess about what she is hiding."

“Have you any explanation of the disappearance?”

“Not at present—unless Lady Dorothy ran away to escape from Miss Dampier. I can understand anyone doing that.”



## CHAPTER II

## I DISCUSS THE PROBLEM WITH BILLY

ON returning to my room I first consulted certain books of reference, and then sent for Sergeant Smith. William Smith is my godson, who is going to marry my youngest daughter. He was recently promoted Sergeant because of the good work he did about a murder case in the City. I find it useful to be in contact with a fresh young mind, though I don't tell Billy this. I tell him what a great privilege he enjoys in working with a man of my experience.

Rapidly I went over the facts which I had learnt, and then asked him what he made of the case.

"It can't be a stunt to boom the school or the lady."

"No, if the facts became public the lady and the school would be ruined. Schoolmistresses must walk in safe ways. It does not do for

them to be lost. That is why Miss Dampier is so upset, although she looks as if she had the nerve to bluff a bank cashier with an obviously forged cheque."

"Both the good ladies cannot have lost their memory at the same time; and if they had both been killed in a motor accident, identity unknown, we should have heard about it."

"I've looked up the accident reports."

"A woman about to commit suicide or to elope with somebody else's man doesn't take her secretary with her. Perhaps she is hard up, and has gone to the States with such money as she could raise, to prevent her creditors getting hold of it."

"A man might do that, but——"

"My dear Mary is always telling me about the equality of the sexes in everything."

"We will leave my daughter out of account at present. You must not let her or her sayings interfere with your concentration on business. I own that it did occur to me that school fees are paid in advance, and school tradesmen would generally allow six months' credit. That suggests possibilities for a person who wishes to abscond; but Miss Dampier tells me that the school is flourishing. Besides, it

is just over half term. The fraudulent school-mistress would have gone before, unhampered by a secretary."

"School Marms have puzzled me ever since I was in an infant school."

"Why?"

"A young teacher slapped me, and I never deserved a slapping more, but the head mistress came in and ticked her off until she cried. She then jawed me until I blubbed for all I was worth. When she went away the young teacher kissed me and said she was sorry—wasn't that silly? and I said she might slap me again if she liked, but I was jolly glad she didn't. I was angry with that Head for more than a week afterwards and clenched my fists whenever I saw her."

"My dear Billy, what has your infantile naughtiness to do with our problem?"

"I was thinking that your Miss Dampier might be like my old head mistress, and your Lady Dorothy like the pretty girl who slapped me."

"In this case Lady Dorothy is head mistress, and Miss Dampier senior assistant."

"Lady Dorothy may be only a figurehead."

"But why should she run away?"

"If your Miss Dampier has a tongue like my old head mistress I shouldn't be surprised at all."

"And where has she run to?"

"Home to her father—that's what Mary would do."

"Her father is dead. Her brother is Lord Castlekerry."

"Where does he hang out?"

"I don't know. Look here, *Who's Who* doesn't help much. It tells you that his name is Patrick, and that he is the eighth Earl and fourteenth Baron Poynings, that he was born in 1899, succeeded to the title in 1914, and was educated at Linchester, nothing more."

"His education must be finished by this time."

"His aunt is Lady Brassingham, of Hill Street. She at least can be found."

"Going to pay her a morning call?"

"Yes! As soon as I have put on a black coat."

"You won't want me to come and hold your hand, sir?"

"No! I want you to do something else. First, get this notice describing the ladies printed and distributed to all the cab shelters. It is possible

some taxi man may remember picking them up at Paddington about 10 o'clock. I can't imagine Lady Dorothy Poynings walking the streets with a large dressmakers' box. Secondly, you can go round to the *Daily Intelligence* and ask for Harry Holloway—you know him?"

"What am I to tell him?"

"Nothing! Not enough for a par. But you might let him know that he will have first news if anything sensational occurs. Get from him all he knows about Castlekerry, Lady Dorothy and Lady Brassingham. For more than two years now he has been in charge of the Social Columns of the *Daily Intelligence*. He goes everywhere, and appears as a guest at all the social functions. He knows a deal of gossip, and all the tit-bits which must not appear in his paper. His job requires a good deal of inside information. If he had not got it, innocent but indiscreet reports would result in social scandals. There are scandals out of which even the Press cannot hope to reap anything, and which would render their Social Reporter an outcast for ever."

"If he has to be so blooming discreet, am I likely to get anything out of him?"

"He is only discreet about what he prints. If

he did not talk a great deal and retail gossip he would not have much told him. Gossip is a matter of exchange. Harry won't waste anything which can be turned into 'copy', but otherwise he is generous enough. Besides his vanity impels him to be loquacious about the Great. 'This,' he will say, 'my dear fellow, is not kitchen gossip. I had it from Lord A. himself at Lady Z's last reception.'"

"Master Holloway must be getting on. I remember him fooling about Aldersford at the time of the de Morville murder. He did not then know the aristocracy from A to Z and their secret misdemeanours."

"And I don't suppose he remembers a person who was so insignificant as you were in those days, but you tell him that you come from me. Another thing—You know that new fast car, which is reserved for the Assistant Commissioner? He is away, and he gave Westley on the Political side and myself leave to use it on emergencies. Westley has had it out, I know, for the last three days—joy riding, I should think. Before going to Holloway, requisition it, and then you can drive me down to Poynings dressed as a chauffeur. I shall start 1.15 sharp."

"That's a bit of all right, sir. I will pump Holloway, and circumvent Inspector Westley. Men on the political side seem to think the whole world belongs to them. They should fly abroad and leave the roads of the old country to us."

## CHAPTER III

## LADY BRASSINGHAM

THE great house in Hill Street looked all right as I approached it. The sun was gleaming on the clean white paint, and the window boxes were full of flowers. Most of the blinds were down, but many of the windows were open, and a house with open windows looks alive. It was when I got within that I felt suffocated by its gloomy magnificence. An awful stillness prevailed. The man who opened the door asked my name and business almost in a whisper, and the man who took my hat and stick did not speak at all. I followed him up a broad staircase with a very thick carpet, and saw myself reflected on the landing in a vast and dim mirror. Then a door was thrown open, and a matter of fact voice said: "Detective Inspector Frost, my lady." I have known the announcement of my name to cause an electric thrill. This morning I felt it lost its



effect through the well-drilled indifference of that footman.

I entered a large room, with five tall windows. The blinds of four were drawn, but the fifth was up. This window leading to the balcony was open, and a flood of sunlight shone on a woman who was writing at a small table. She had her hat on, and it reminded me of a soldier's helmet. She was dressed to go out, and her gloves lay on the table beside her. When she saw me, she rose, and grasped an ebony stick with an ivory handle. She said:

"I am Lady Brassingham. Won't you sit down?"

That presented a difficulty. The upright chairs looked too fragile to bear the weight of my sixteen stone, and sixteen stone does not easily rise from a deep and comfortable chair. Besides at the time I had an insane fear of being smothered in upholstery. However I found a high chair with a circular back and seated myself in it.

Lady Brassingham remained standing, leaning on her stick, though I was sure she had no need of support. She might be sixty, but her eyes were bright, and she looked at me with a quizzical expression.

Seeing her standing, I was struggling back to my feet, when she interrupted me.

"No sit where you are. I like standing, but I hate to have anyone standing beside me. You have come on business, and I am going out. So the sooner you tell your business the better."

"Your Ladyship has, I believe, heard of the strange disappearance of Lady Dorothy Poynings."

"Yes! That Dampier woman was here this morning. Seemed to think I was Dorothy's nursemaid, and wanted to know what I had done with her."

"Quite so, and you told her that Lady Dorothy did not come here on Saturday, and was not expected. Also, that you did not know where she was."

"Oh, you know all that do you? Then why on earth have you come to waste my time and yours?"

"I thought your Ladyship might be able to give me some indication of likely places where I might seek for Lady Dorothy."

"Well, you thought wrong. Ten years ago I wanted the girl—she was a girl then—to make her home with us. My husband was

then alive—but, like all the bright young things to-day, she wanted to live her own life. She has. What's more, she has always boasted of how successful she has been—and now she has vanished into the blue, and the police are after her."

"Your Ladyship can suggest no method of inquiry?"

"You can advertise, I suppose. Fill the evening rags with suggestions, and make the name of Poynings as cheap as that of a Film Star. Good Lord, what a world we live in!"

"At present, I think it wise to avoid publicity. That is why I came here hoping for your Ladyship's assistance."

"And you have been disappointed. Old women no longer chaperone young ones. I am sorry that you have wasted your time."

"I have not wasted my time," said I, rising from my chair. "I have learnt three very important facts and guessed a fourth."

"What may they be," asked Lady Brassingham, in some surprise.

"First, that your Ladyship has some reason for disliking Miss Dampier."

"Of course I have—I don't take the trouble to dislike people for nothing."

"Secondly, that the missing lady has great force of character."

"I didn't tell you that."

"No, but I have seen you, and am convinced that only a young woman of great force of character could have withstood your wishes. But for that she would now be your companion."

"No! she wouldn't. By this time she would have had a husband, and a couple of babies of her own—a good deal better than washing other people's brats."

"Thirdly, I think you are rather afraid of some family scandal being discovered."

"How dare you say such a thing!" exclaimed Lady Brassingham, raising the point of her stick and digging it into the carpet.

"I only concluded that from your Ladyship's reticence."

"You are wrong. I've told you all I know, and that's nothing."

"Fourthly," I went on, "I believe your Ladyship is much more interested in Lady Dorothy's disappearance than you have given me to suppose, and I should not be surprised if you had already planned inquiries on your own account."

"Dear me! You are not such a fool as I supposed. Now sit down again and tell me what steps you think I am likely to take."

"If you were very wise you would come to Scotland Yard and co-operate with us."

Lady Brassingham sniffed.

"If you were very foolish, you would go to a Private Enquiry Agent, who would take your money, shadow all the wrong people, and create a horrible scandal."

Lady Brassingham sniffed again.

"As you are a lady of strong common sense, I guess that you will consult your family solicitor before doing anything."

"I am glad you credit me with common sense—and you are right—I was expecting Mr. Trehearne, my solicitor, when you arrived."

"Unfortunately for you, he won't come to-day."

"How do you know that?"

"From the *Morning Post*. To-day his only daughter is to be married at St. James', Paddington, to Mr. Charles Steele, of the Bengal Lancers. But for this case I should have been there. Not as a guest, but from interest in the bridegroom."

"You know Mr. Trehearne?"

"I met him in a case some four years ago. He is rather old, isn't he, for a game of hide and seek."

"We are none of us as young as we were, Inspector."

"Oh, I am five years under the age limit for retirement. Mr. Trehearne has achieved his high position by being an old man very early in life. We, if I may presume to include your Ladyship, will never be old in his way."

Lady Brassingham considered this speech, and I think approved it. For the first time she sat down. Then after looking at me hard—she was not staring, she was thinking; she said:

"Supposing I was as wise as you would wish me to be. Supposing I went to consult Scotland Yard—what would Scotland Yard advise me to do?"

"They would advise you to go at once to Poynings Hall and look into things."

"I go to a Girls' School—the school I've always disapproved of. The school in my old home—with other people's nasty little children in my rooms. I've told Dorothy again and again that nothing would induce me to go.

her to come with me. Tell George to be round with the Daimler at three o'clock."

"There!" said Lady Brassingham, as the door closed, "I have taken service as a female detective." She sat down for a minute and looked at me out of those bright quizzical eyes. "I wonder why I did it," she went on, and rose to look out of the window. There she stood—I imagine she was looking at nothing. She seemed to have forgotten me. All I heard was—"Castlekerry's daughter" and "I promised Molly." Then suddenly she swung round: "She has got to be found, Inspector—and without any noise. You may take my word for it that Dampier woman is somehow or other responsible. Dorothy is high spirited and impulsive, but she would not do anything wrong. She's Irish, and, dear me, what an unaccountable race we are!"

As I went out, and before I had reached the door, she called after me: "When you reach the 'Fisherman's Arms,' you may mention my name—say, you know me. Robinson, who keeps it was butler at the Hall before the crash. And, Inspector, don't say you are Inspector, don't say you are Inspector Frost. You won't, will you? Mr. Frost is quite good enough."

"I shall be Mr. Frost, one of the New Rich, recommended by your Ladyship to send my daughter to be educated at Poynings Hall."

"Well, I will say this for you. You aren't a fool."



## CHAPTER IV

## A MOTOR RIDE

"WELL, Billy, what have you discovered?"

I asked this after sitting down in the car usually reserved for the Assistant Commissioner.

"I have so much to tell that if I started in this traffic (we were then at the top of Whitehall) you would never hear it all—at least not in this world."

"I can wait," said I. "I depend on your eyes, your hands and feet. Good heavens, be careful! That was a near thing."

"An easy half inch," said Billy. "You just admire the country, sir, and don't look at me."

On we went, and it was not until we were on a broad high road outside the London area, that Billy began.

"Odd chap, that Press friend of yours!"

"Why odd?"

"He was awfully keen to know what you were up against."

"Nothing odd in that."

"Said that you were a crafty old devil, and that he had helped you again and again for nix."

"There is nothing odd in his being an ungrateful and untruthful young man."

"No! but it is odd that he should be willing to help you again."

"He has an intelligent anticipation of benefits to come."

"There are no flies on him, certainly—I bet you he finds out about the lady's disappearance before night."

"Then you must have given the show away."

"I didn't. I was only the perfect innocent sitting at the feet of the learned, and asking questions; but before I left, he said: 'If the old Lord hasn't resurrected, and the young Lord hasn't committed bigamy, Lady Dorothy must have been attempting to poison the old Brassingham with arsenic in chocolates. I'm betting on her.'"

"I say, Billy, you might slow down a bit—I should then be able to take in what you are saying."

"We are not doing more than fifty."

"Much too fast!"

"This one will do seventy easily. I will show you when we come to a suitable bit of road."

"You decrease to twenty and tell me your news."

"Then that blighter will pass us. He has been trying to do so these last ten miles."

"Just remember we are out on business. This is not a sports' contest."

"All right! Now, you're satisfied. See his grin! Beaten by a Baby Austin. Good Lord! Now what do you want me to tell you, sir?"

"First, about Lord Castlekerry, the father."

"He was some boy—made a century against Harrow at Lords."

"That was some time ago."

"Fought in the Tirah campaign."

"An adventurous person!"

"Married a girl off the Gaiety stage."

"A very adventurous person!"

"It turned out all right."

"Now *that* is remarkable."

"Got a D.S.O. in South Africa."

"That sort of person could not help himself."

"Made a speech in the House of Lords which caused old Haldane to look small."

"Impossible! Haldane was my build."

"Owned a favourite for the Derby, which didn't win."

"Not an unknown experience."

"Rejoined Household Cavalry in August, 1914. Reported missing during the Retreat from Mons. Death presumed after six months—Howling and lamentation among the Children of Israel. He had borrowed all that he could, and there was jolly little for his creditors."

"And his wife?"

"Died in 1910. Holloway said that after her death the old chap became utterly reckless."

"He could not have been very old."

"Forty-six—and he had done most things before he died."

"Yes!—Now that is very interesting!—Lord Castlekerry had nothing to come back for, and was reported missing in 1914. Now that is very interesting."

"Why?"

"Good heavens, Billy! Did you go over that hen?"

"Not I—wily old bird. She will live to have her neck wrung, and will probably be served up somewhere as spring chicken."

"Look here! We are going too fast again—I don't want to be at Poynings Hall before

3-30, and I do want to hear all your news. I want to hear about the present Earl."

"Then you won't."

"Stop, Billy! my hat is gone."

"Bother!" said Billy, as he pulled up. I got out. It seemed a long way back to my hat, and, when found, I beat more dust out of it than I thought a hat could hold. Billy sat at the wheel grinning. He ought to have gone for it, and I told him so."

"Thought you might start the car on your own, sir—and you know that you are not safe with cars."

"I wish they had never been invented."

"There would then be no 'Flying Squad.'"

"And no need for one. What were you saying about Lord Castlekerry, when my hat blew away. I just put up my hand to push it back—it's a habit I've got."

"Bad habit in a car."

"No matter! Now what were you telling me about Lord Castlekerry?"

"Nothing, sir! There's nothing to tell. Holloway didn't know. I suppose he disappeared. Disappearing family—the Poynings . . . I say, did you see that 'Baby'?"

"No! where?"

"Standing before that pub. The chap, who was driving it, has got out for a drink—wanted to celebrate the fact that he has passed me."

"Never mind him, Billy. Get on to Lady Dorothy. What did Holloway tell you about her?"

"Not much! He doesn't know her personally. I suppose he doesn't get asked to Speech Days. Only low class journalists take down the gracious words of the Mayor's wife in giving away the prizes for good conduct. He knows about the school. It's quite a slap up establishment—£300 a year and no extras. That's on the prospectus. Holloway says parents can have extras if they insist on them—extra milk for the little dears, or instruction in Arabic—but if they will have extras, they have to pay for them through the nose. Wait a moment while we go through this one-horse-town, the one-horse is always on the wrong side of the road. Worse!"

The brakes went on suddenly, and I was jumped on my seat. Two women with perambulators had just been comparing babies in the middle of the road. As we swung round the corner, one flew to the right of us and one stood still. It was a miracle that there was

not an accident. Then Billy became voluble and said things, and so did the women. They said they would tell the police, but no policeman was in sight, and no doubt we were miles on our way before one could be found."

"Where was I," said Billy? "Oh, about the school at Poynings Hall. All the girls have titles or millions. Holloway says that they will all be well known women, but at present he has no interest in them. The naughtiness of a child has no news value."

"Had he heard of Miss Dampier?"

"Didn't ask, but it isn't likely. He became quite eloquent though over Lady Brassingham. That old girl must be a character."

"I've found that out for myself."

"She was Lady Anne Poynings, and she married the brewer—Lord Brassingham."

"*Who's Who* told me that."

"Holloway says—she is the richest widow in England. Old Brassingham got pots out of beer."

"You more generally get beer out of pots."

The car swerved suddenly and Billy said:

"I'll tell you what it is, sir, if you make another joke like that one, I shall land you in the ditch."

"Look here, Billy, why don't you look where you are going? That last sign-post said 'Poynings, 4 miles.'"

Billy grunted, reversed his engines, and we went back to the signpost which said "Poynings, 4 miles" all right, but it was straight on.

"I thought we were on the right road," grumbled Billy.

"I've told you not to go so fast. It was only because of my quickness of sight that I saw that signpost at all."

"It was a pity you did, sir."

"We have now half an hour to do four miles, so we will stop for a few minutes. I should like a pipe before facing Miss Dampier, and you can finish your tale."

"I bet Roberts at the Yard we would get there by three."

"You've already lost that bet. You might have reckoned on doing so if I was in the car. When I was your age I had never driven in anything faster than a farmer's gig, and we thought ten miles in the hour very good going."

"What a world," said Billy.

"Is this a better? That's what I am always asking myself. You can't compare them, so you had better tell me more about Lady Brassingham



and her pots of money. What is she going to do with it?"

"Holloway wondered if she would restore the Poynings family."

"I expect Lady Dorothy wrecked her chances when she refused to be the good lady's companion. There are some disadvantages for the modern girl in being so independent."

"You forget Lord Castlekerry."

"I don't. Either you or I will probably have to go to Linchester and find out what we can about him. Perhaps he is in Ireland."

"I should not think so from what I heard. Holloway was in Ireland last year, and that is where he heard all about Lady Brassingham. I say, if you want to get a rise out of the old girl you just say something against the Irish Loyalists, and she will go off the deep end with a splash."

"My dear Billy, if you are to marry my daughter Mary, you must learn not to mix your metaphors. She belongs to a Literary Society, and has taught me a lot."

"Now what have I said wrong?"

"You spoke of getting a rise out of Lady Brassingham by making her go off the deep end."

"Well, if a person goes off the deep end and doesn't rise, she is drowned. I guess Lady Brassingham won't be drowned for want of kicking. Do you know the sort of old girl she is? Holloway told me she went to Castlekerry in '21, and walked to church down the middle of the road with the policeman whom everybody expected to be shot. Lady B. isn't a Papist, but she went to Mass that day with the policeman, and no policeman goes to church unless he's a Papist."

"That's not true, Billy—I do."

"How you spoil my story. Well, the old girl marched into the vestry after service and asked the Priest: "Do you believe murder is forbidden? 'Sure and I do, your Ladyship,' replied his Reverence. 'Then preach on it next Sunday,' said Lady Brassingham 'and I'll come to hear you.' She didn't, because before next Sunday they had shot the policeman and burnt Castle Kerry."

"Oh, Castle Kerry is burnt, is it?"

"Yes, and Lady Brassingham was pulled out of it in her pyjamas. Holloway says the people thereabouts still tell one another the things Lady Brassingham said about them in the drive."

"What were they."

"I don't know, but Holloway said that they would fairly blister your tongue. The Irish did admire her. They had never been so cursed. Strange folk they must be, but Holloway said it was the artistic temperament. They simply revelled in her invective."

"Dear me, dear me! I begin to be sorry for Miss Dampier."

"Why?"

"Because Lady Brassingham, who does not like her, is going to visit Poynings Hall. We must push on now, for I want to have my interview before the lady arrives."

## CHAPTER V

## THE SCHOOL AT POYNINGS HALL

POYNINGS HALL was one of those delightful houses which epitomise English History. Each generation had added something to the building or adapted old work to more modern requirements. Creepers in places masked these transitions from one style to another, while time had seemingly blunted or softened all hard lines. In fact the house had become one with the gardens which surrounded it, and nature had claimed and made her own the crude devices of man. The gardens no doubt were not kept up as they had been, but they were tidy, and the beautiful lawns had been newly mown. Several girls were playing tennis in the front of the house, while beyond a grassy terrace I could see cricket being played in the park, and wondered what the levelling of the ground had cost. As we swept round the house to a forbidding mediaeval entrance we faced the small lake, now converted into a bathing pool, with

dressing boxes painted green discreetly camouflaged among the rhododendrons.

Outside, however, Poynings Hall might still have seemed one of the stately homes of England, but you had only to enter the house to find that within it was an up-to-date institution. The hall itself was evidently the place of assembly. Maps and historical pictures in photogravure had taken the place of ancestral portraits. Cane chairs were arranged in rows facing the dais, and school-girl lockers lined the walls instead of inlaid cabinets. There was also a green baize notice board, with squares of white paper on it fastened with drawing-pins. It was the notice board which I found so noticeable.

I was shown into a small waiting-room. The furniture was new, and it was quite good furniture, but there was a sort of stiffness in the arrangement. It suggested—business is transacted here. A framed time-table was on the wall behind the closed roll-top desk, and there was a small table by the window with a closed typewriter. Here evidently Lady Dorothy dictated letters to Miss Le Fanu, and interviewed young ladies who had been reported to her.

I had not to wait long before Miss Dampier entered and closed the door. She did this quite definitely after placing a card outside with the word *Engaged*. She asked me to sit by the empty fireplace, and ensconced herself in the swivel chair which she drew from behind the roll-top desk. She had her back to the light. Decision was to be noted in all her movements, and no one seeing her would ever have imagined that she was only the Assistant—however highly salaried.

"You have heard nothing from Lady Dorothy Poynings," I asked.

"No, and her absence is very embarrassing. The *Daily Intelligence* rang us up at lunch time. The editor is planning a series of articles upon Girls' Schools. He wanted to know if he might send someone to interview Lady Dorothy Poynings to-morrow."

"What did you tell him?"

"That Lady Dorothy was away for a couple of days, and would write to him herself when she returned."

"Have you made any further inquiries?"

"There were none to make."

"Have you questioned the chauffeur who drove the ladies to the station?"

"What should I question him about?"

"I should like to know about that dress-maker's cardboard box. If it contained a frock or even two it would be very light. The chauffeur would put one finger through the string; ask him if he carried it under his arm? I should like to know the size of Miss Le Fanu's attaché case, and whether Lady Dorothy also had a handbag."

"It will be awkward asking such questions without raising suspicions."

"Not at all," said I, somewhat untruthfully. "Not if you ask them and I don't."

Miss Dampier was evidently reluctant. She thought for a minute before rising. When she did so she walked resolutely to the door. She had her plan and could carry it out—a really efficient woman.

She was not absent for long, and when she returned I heard that the cardboard box was neither very light nor very heavy, and that the chauffeur certainly carried it under his arm, that Miss Le Fanu's attaché case was an expanding one, much expanded, and that Lady Dorothy had a dressing bag as well.

"That settles it!" said I. They meant to go away, and we can dismiss the accident theory."

"Nonsense," said Miss Dampier, "why should they?"

"Have you discovered anything fresh about Miss Le Fanu?"

"No! I have never considered her of any importance."

"Don't you see the fact that Lady Dorothy *and* her secretary have disappeared makes the disappearance more mysterious."

"Not if some unknown accident has happened to both of them."

"The whole business must be very inconvenient for you, and entirely upset your plans."

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Dampier sharply: "My plans?"

"I was thinking of that time-table behind you. I know about these things. Not so long ago I was called in because a head master was found dead in his study just before the beginning of term. Was it suicide or murder? It turned out to be suicide. The poor man had gone mad in trying to construct a time-table by which a small staff could prepare boys for thirteen different entrance examinations."

"Here the staff is quite adequate. I may say its members are especially well qualified



and experienced. Besides, our girls, for the most part, do not need to pass examinations."

"Just so, and that reminds me. Speaking as a prospective parent, the fees are, I understand, £300 a year."

"That is so. We have sixty girls in the school and a waiting list. The school is full." Miss Dampier said this with decision. For the moment she was contemplating me as really a parent with a girl she was *not* prepared to educate."

"I have been told," I went on, that your girls may be divided into those who have titles and those who have millions."

"That is an absurd—I might say—a vulgar way of putting it."

"Now I expect the girls with millions pay the fees; but how about the girls with titles. Some Peers are not rich, and yet I imagine that even in a school of this sort an Earl's daughter has an advertisement value."

"Really, Inspector, it would not be right that I should give you the information you ask for, even supposing that I was in a position to do so. I cannot understand how such facts can have any relevance to Lady Dorothy's disappearance."

"I was thinking that this place does not take £18,000 a year to run, and that Lady Dorothy's profits should be very large; but if half the girls do not pay the fees, if there are many bad debts, and if there are mortgages to be paid off, why——"

"You must understand that I am only the salaried assistant and not interested in the finances of the school."

"I thought that as Lady Dorothy's confidential friend——"

"I should not betray anything she may have told me."

"Then I shall have to get my information elsewhere. Can you give me the address of the present Earl of Castlekerry?"

"No."

"You have, I suppose, communicated to him the fact of Lady Dorothy's disappearance."

"I don't know where he is."

"But you have been the friend of the family for so long. You must have known the Earl as a child."

"I knew him as a spoilt boy, and when he came home from Linchester I had to forbid him my schoolroom."

"Does Lady Dorothy know of his whereabouts?"

"I imagine not."

"Am I then to assume that you are not in the lady's confidence?"

"I consider that a most unwarrantable inference."

There was a pause—we looked at one another. Miss Dampier resented my questions no doubt quite rightly, but how did she expect me to find Lady Dorothy if she withheld information. I waited a minute or so before saying:

"I am afraid we are not making much progress. In fact I doubt if you can tell me anything that would be of use to me. The next thing for me to do is to see the school. I sometimes learn more about a person by seeing where she lived and her customary environment than by cross-examining those who knew her. So may I resume my rôle of a prospective parent, and will you take me round the building as you would if I were thinking of committing a child to your care?"

"I see nothing in your suggestion, but if you wish to see the house, you may."

Miss Dampier got up and walked out of the room. She took me through four classrooms

which had once been splendid saloons. She showed me two laboratories which had been built on to the old house. Then she took me up a beautiful wooden staircase with carved balustrades, remarking, "The girls are not allowed to use this." Next I was shown the three day rooms, and here I was interested. The first was reserved for little girls, and was full of untidy litter; games and school books were mingled together, the tables were anyhow, the pictures not straight, and there was one over-turned chair. "I shall decree a general tidying after tea," said Miss Dampier. The second room showed some progress in a sense of order. At least each girl had her separate table and her own rubbish heap on open shelves. There were a few ornaments, and a good many framed photographs. There were also some comfortable chairs rather the worse for wear, and most of them had something in them, such as a tennis racquet or a novel open and turned face downwards. The third room was reserved for the upper school. There were flowers in pots on enamelled tables, chairs with bright cushions, books on their shelves properly arrayed and a good many pictures and nick-nacks. The one thing missing was any sign

of needlework, and I remarked on it to Miss Dampier, asking "Who is going to sew on the buttons for the next generation?" She did not know or care, but wishing to conciliate her, I said, "Here we see the results of your training—the little barbarians of the first room have become civilized." Miss Dampier, however, did not respond, but proceeded wearily to the dormitories.

As we reached the first door we heard a noise. An angry voice was saying, "You naughty child, how dare you! You know you have no right to be here." Miss Dampier flung open the door, and there was a girl of sixteen vigorously shaking a child of nine or ten in a very crumpled and somewhat dirty muslin pinafore.

"What does this mean," asked Miss Dampier, facing the elder girl? The little one, I observed, dodged behind me and disappeared.

"Angela was under my bed. She frightened me."

"And what were you doing on the bed, when you were down to play cricket?"

"Lady Dorothy told me last week that I might come and lie down when I had a headache."

"Your headache hasn't lasted a week, I

suppose. Who gave you leave to come up here this afternoon?"

"Nobody, but I thought——"

"You shouldn't think." Miss Dampier suddenly made a dive past the girl, and withdrew a book from the bed, which had been hidden by the pillow. It was a book I knew—a good book—a book I had written myself to explain how I discovered the secret of the de Morville murder.

"Trash," said Miss Dampier, holding up the volume. "Trash," she repeated. "So for this you had a headache and did not play cricket? You will be good enough to write out the first three chapters of that book before you go to bed, and you will know by then what trash it is."

"Yes, Miss Dampier," said the girl. Her face was scarlet, her lips were tight drawn, and fury blazed from her eyes. She walked however with an assumption of dignity towards the door.

"Where is Angela?" asked Miss Dampier.

"She went away, Miss Dampier."

"Will you find her at once and send her to bed. She ought to have gone the walk with the other juniors. Tell her that I shall come

upstairs after tea and talk to her. Angela has wanted a good talking to for a long time."

"Yes, Miss Dampier."

"That's the daughter of the Duke of Bedminster," said Miss Dampier as the door closed.

"She will be a very stately young woman some day."

"No! I don't mean Betty Mugliston.—It's Angela who is the Duke's daughter—a very troublesome child—Lady Dorothy spoils her."

We walked on through the dormitories and saw the Matron's room, and the linen cupboards, Miss Dampier glancing at me from time to time. She was trying to discern my motive, and could not, which is not surprising, because it was all preparatory to my request.

"I should like to see Lady Dorothy's private room before I go. I think, as a prospective parent, it is there she would have received me."

"Really, Inspector, is it necessary to keep up this—this play acting?"

"Quite," I replied. "Unfortunately a detective's life is largely concerned with pretending to be what he is not."

Miss Dampier moved down a passage and

threw open a door. "This," she said, "is Lady Dorothy's sitting-room. In the old days it was the schoolroom, and she preferred it to all others."

"She showed very good taste," said I, as I entered a long, low room filled with the afternoon sun. There were plenty of books, pictures and china, old furniture and cosy chairs. It was a woman's room, but there was nothing in it which suggested the head mistress.

Just then a bell clanged out from the tower—a terrible bell suitable for a fire alarm or something equally terrifying. "What's that?" I asked.

"That is to call the girls up from the playing fields to get ready for tea. It is now 4.15. Tea is at 4.30. We go in to work at 5. The little ones go to bed at 7, and the elder ones dress for dinner at 7.30. At 8.30 the middle school goes to bed. The seniors an hour later. All lights are out at 10."

"You must have a very busy life."

"And in Lady Dorothy's absence I am responsible for everything. So if you have seen all that you desire——"

"One minute, Miss Dampier. Is there a photograph of Lady Dorothy?"



"Yes," said Miss Dampier, pointing to one that was not framed, on the mantelpiece. An obviously enlarged snapshot.

"Taken, if I mistake not, on the terrace beneath the Casino at Monte Carlo."

"You have been at Monte Carlo?"

"All detectives of my rank sooner or later go to Monte Carlo on business,"

"Lady Dorothy was, I believe, on the Riviera during the Easter holidays."

"And who is the gentleman with her?"

"I don't know. Some hotel acquaintance, I suppose."

"And the other lady?"

"Oh, that is Miss Le Fanu. Lady Dorothy picked her up during the Easter holidays."

"She looks a very pretty and attractive girl."

"There goes the second bell! You must really excuse me, Inspector."

And I did.

As we descended the broad polished stairs, down two corridors came the young ladies. They were all walking very fast, each behind the other in single file, and but for their footfall there was no noise. They passed into the dining-room apparently without noticing us.

Then for a minute there was complete silence. As we crossed the hall somebody was saying grace. As I reached the door there was a sudden clatter, and I was sure that sixty young voices were all talking at once.

I said Good-bye to Miss Dampier, and stepped outside to look for my car and Billy.

## CHAPTER VI

## A DUKE'S DAUGHTER

"HERE I am, Billy. Have you been sitting like a Robot in the car ever since I went in?"

"I don't know much about Robots, but I've been having a confidential chat with a Duke's daughter. When you've seen the daughter, you will know that it is an exciting experience. The Infant School where I was educated, would have closed down if she had been entered on the books."

"Well, look here, Billy, before going to the 'Fisherman's Arms', where you will be my highly-paid chauffeur, I think we will run back to the place we stopped at before coming here. There is a glorious view over a wooded valley, which every tourist should enjoy. There I shall be able to go through my interview with Miss Dampier, and get my ideas in order. Then you will be able to tell me all you have learnt from the Duke's daughter."

"Nobody offered me any tea at that school," grumbled Billy.

"Nor me. But business must come before tea."

It was a delightful June afternoon, and the view I found to be inspiring. Billy looked at it with a Cockney's lack of intelligence. He was only interested in the cars which passed and the counties from which they came. It is just because I enjoyed the stillness and the sunlight that my mind worked unconsciously and I formed conclusions.

"Now, Billy—listen! First of all I am clear that Lady Dorothy and Miss Dampier are no longer on confidential terms.

"Secondly, Miss Dampier is less concerned for Lady Dorothy than for the effect her disappearance may have on the school.

"Thirdly, Lady Dorothy must have started that school on borrowed money, and is probably paying interest at a very high rate.

"Fourthly, though the fees are high it is probable that many of the parents do not pay them."

"I will bet you that the Duke does," interrupted Billy. "No school Marm would undertake the looking after of his daughter at a reduction."

"Be quiet, Billy. You shall tell me all about that in a minute. Where was I? O! Fifthly—the school is well organised and the girls well disciplined—I saw them go in to tea—but is this due to Lady Dorothy? Betty Mugliston thought she could shelter herself behind the head mistress, and Miss Dampier said that Lady Dorothy spoilt the Lady Angela."

"That's my little darling!" ejaculated Billy.

"Sixthly. From her photograph Lady Dorothy looks a charming woman. Her room proclaims her to be a cultivated woman with varied tastes. Again, she likes life, society and excitement or she would not go to Monte Carlo in her holidays."

"Oh, she goes off on a frisk, does she," said Billy. "After plundering the idle rich on the pretence of educating their daughters in religion and sound learning, she blows the dibs in a little flutter at the green tables. Now if she were under a Local Education Authority what a lot of hot air would be ventilated about her."

"You know nothing of such things."

"Yes! I do. The *Evening Sentinel* last night had columns about a head master who had kissed one of the female teachers. The

head master said he didn't, the teacher said she wouldn't have allowed it. Three children—little mar-sports—had seen them at it. So there had been an inquiry, but the Education Authority and the N.U.T. who know nothing about kissing, came to different conclusions, and The *Evening Sentinel* condemned everyone concerned for corrupting children's morals. That's where I learnt about religion and sound learning."

"Do shut up, Billy. I've got down my six points. Now there's a seventh. Who was the man with her at Monte Carlo, and who is Miss Le Fanu—she was also there. I incline to think Miss Le Fanu is the most mysterious fact we have to account for. Where does she come from?"

"Devonshire."

"How do you know that?"

"The Duke's daughter told me. She and her brother Bobby—I suppose he will be a Duke some day—having annoyed the family by having chicken-pox—were sent to Woolacombe with a governess last year. On the sands they met Miss Le Fanu and her young man. He was quite a nice young man—named Johnson. He had red hair and was first rate

at building sand castles. The Lady Angela had not told anyone but Joan about the young man. It was a tremendous secret. Miss Le Fanu was a dear, but she was rather odd when she met the Duke's daughter unexpectedly at the school. The Duke's daughter said, it was because of the young man—'As if I'd tell—that is anyone but Joan?'"

"That's interesting, Billy. You had better now tell me all about your interview with Lady Angela, and exactly what was said."

"I was sitting in the car smoking a fag and wondering when someone would come and suggest a cup of tea. They always do that in decent houses—when the door opened and a little girl came out. She was as lively as a kitten and twice as mischievous. She just danced down those steps and came to me straight.

"'I say, what's the car?'"

"'A Sunbeam.'"

"'Thought so! We have one at home. May I get in?' And in she was before I could say yes or no.

"'Whose car is it?'"

"'Mr. Frost's.'"

"'Is he the stuffy old bird I saw with the

Damper upstairs. Oh, you don't know—we always call her The Damper. I say, may I pull that lever?’

“‘No, Miss! Mr. Frost wouldn't like it.’

“‘Don't call me Miss—I'm the Lady Angela Plantagenet Altamont and my Daddy is a Duke.’

“‘Very well, my Lady——’

“‘You need not call me that—only servants do that—well, you are a servant, aren't you? But it doesn't matter. You may call me the Squirt if you like—all the girls do. There! I've pulled that lever after all. You don't mind do you? Not very much?’

“‘I'll tell you what it is, Miss—if you touch anything else you will go straight out of this car.’

“‘All right! Don't be shirty! I say, do you know, Our Dolly's done a bunk.’

“‘What's happened to your doll?’

“‘Not doll, silly! Our Dolly—that's what we call Lady Dorothy. She's not a bad sort, though she has got a temper which goes off pop when you don't expect it. She's done a bunk.’

“‘Do you mean that she has run away? Where has she gone?’

“‘I don't know—Kenya, perhaps.’



“‘Why Kenya?’

“‘Oh, it’s a place in America or somewhere that people who run away go to. My Aunt Mary ran away with Captain Morgan. They went to Kenya—Mummy said. Thank goodness, there is a Kenya for them.’

“‘But why should Lady Dorothy go to Kenya?’

“‘Perhaps she got a young man like Aunt Mary. I hope he’s nicer than Captain Morgan. Bobby and I thought him horrid, and Daddy said he was a bounder.’

“‘Do all the girls know that Lady Dorothy has gone?’

“‘You bet. Even we little ones know—though the big girls go about whispering and won’t say a word when we are present—that’s their swank. The Damper—lying old cat—said Lady Dorothy was detained in town—and she tells us that we ought to speak the truth. I do! On my honour as a Brownie!’ Here the Lady Angela drew herself up and came to the salute. She’s a wonder! Then somehow we got on to Miss Le Fanu, and she told me about Devonshire, and how her brother, Bobby, nearly got drowned, and how the unfortunate woman, their governess, burst into

tears, so that they had to be good for ever so long afterwards. It was just then that a tall girl came out of the door, calling 'Angela!' In a trice the Duke's daughter was at the bottom of the car. 'Don't you let on that I am here,' she said. The tall girl came straight to the car and asked: 'Have you seen a little girl come out?' 'Yes Miss, some little time back,' I answered, and I bent over the Lady Angela to look out down the drive. 'Thank you,' said the tall girl, and down the drive she went. Do you know what the Lady Angela Plantagenet Altamont did? She bobbed up and put her arms round my neck and kissed me. 'You're a brick,' she said. What do you think of that?"

"That you haven't the honour of a Brownie."

"I didn't say anything that was untrue," said Billy.

"After that she told me that she was ten years old all but five months, and that Bobby was eleven—that her Daddy had spanked him and said it was quite time he went to school. That was more than a year ago. As a matter of fact they had both been sent to school—I expect for the same reason—but they had taken it out of their parents by developing

chicken-pox in Scotland just on the eve of the Twelfth. It was when they recovered that they were sent to Woolacombe.

"Just then that bell went in the Tower. 'Blow!' said the Lady Angela. 'I suppose I'd better get out and face the music.' That's what Daddy said to Bobby when he spanked him. Bobby had been hiding.

"Suddenly a lot of little girls all dressed alike in blue frocks came up to the car.

"'Hulloh!' said one of them, 'there's Angela—I say, Squirt, where have you been? Miss Dalton is in an awful bate because you did not come for the walk.'

"'And,' said another, 'here's Betty coming up the drive shrieking for you. It seems to me you are in for it.'

"'Well!' said the Squirt, 'she's been having a hairy old time herself upstairs with the Damper—I know that.'

"'What have you been up to?' asked some five children at once, but all the Squirt said was, 'Have any of you kids got some chocs?' They hadn't.

"'Bother,' said the Squirt. 'It's beastly enough being sent to bed, but if you are sent to bed, it's horrid having nothing to do. Some

of you kids must have chocs, so don't be so beastly mean.'

"It was then that the tall girl pounced on the Duke's daughter. I saw she was for it."

"Don't you be so sure! Did you notice that big car which passed us a few minutes back?"

"Yes, a Daimler—London lettering."

"Lady Brassingham was inside. Perhaps Miss Dampier won't have time after tea to reduce that child to tears."

## CHAPTER VII

## THE "FISHERMAN'S ARMS"

FIFTY yards below the Park Gates was the "Fisherman's Arms". It was approached by a bridge. A small garden with green tables and green chairs was bounded by a low stone wall separating it from the road and fencing it from the stream. Here guests could have tea. You saw this garden first and the gable end of the inn as you crossed the bridge. The front entrance was further on, a little back from the road, so that motors could be parked in front. The character of the inn had been entirely changed since Robinson, the late Earl's butler, had taken the place. He had acquired the fishing rights for a mile or more down the stream, and had made what had been an ordinary public house into a comfortable resort for anglers. The success of the school had also added to his profits, and he obtained greater accommodation by converting some outbuildings into rooms without

spoiling the old-world aspect of the place. He prided himself on the solid English food which he supplied, but still more on a really sound claret and on a choice of vintages in port. He had been lucky in buying the cellar at Poynings Hall for a song, and had himself superintended the removal of the wine. He whispered to those whom he considered worthy that he still had some pre-war whisky.

All this I discovered during the two days I spent at the "Fisherman's Arms". I did not know it when Billy drove up to the door and Robinson came out to welcome me. The worthy landlord had a pleasant rotundity about him. His face was round, his body was round, round were the curves of his double chin. He looked like an elderly cherub—very smiling and innocent—but he was capable of great discretion. He was polite to all, deferential to some, and confessed that he knew his place and kept it. I am sure he always kept anything that was worth keeping which chanced to come his way.

He looked at the car, at Billy and me. He concluded, I imagine, that we were the sort of people who would pay all right, but were not exactly the people for whom he angled.

"I have come down to see the school at Poynings Hall," I explained.

"Yes, sir."

"And Lady Brassingham, who recommended the school, told me what a comfortable hotel you had."

"You know Lady Brassingham?"

"Not well, but she is responsible for my being here."

"You would like a private sitting room, sir?"

"No thank you! The coffee-room and lounge will do for me. I have been in many queer places in my time and seen plenty of queer people. I like 'em—give me life."

"I am afraid, sir, you will find no queer people here."

"I'll take my chance. My man will bring up my bag when he has put the car in the garage, and he will valet me. That's all right."

Mr. Robinson asked me to sign my name in his visitors' book and noted that I was Mr. Frost and came from London and was British born. He had hoped for something more definite. He took me to a charming old-fashioned bedroom, and waited for fresh orders.

"I hope Lady Brassingham was well when you saw her last, sir."

"Quite! I should not be surprised if you saw her to-morrow."

"Really, sir! It's strange, but her Ladyship has not been to Poynings since the Hall was sold, and I have heard, sir, that Lady Dorothy Poynings is not at home."

"That's right, I have just been to the school. Lady Dorothy is away."

"But Lady Brassingham, you say, sir, is going to stay with her."

"I thought so. Perhaps I was wrong."

"I see, sir. Nothing more, sir. Dinner will be served at 7.30. I will see that the table in the wondow is reserved for you."

Mr. Robinson withdrew, and a few minutes after Billy appeared with my bag.

"Put it down, Billy, and shut the door." Billy did so.

"Billy, that man knows about the disappearance. He tried to get something out of me."

"I expect everyone in this village knows. I don't suppose they talk of anything else."

"Just so, will you wander about and find out what they are saying, and don't appear too inquisitive. You might have a drink in



the taproom later on. Before that you might visit the post office. You might even visit the village constable, terrify him with your warrant card, make him talk to you, and threaten him if he says a word to anyone else. But don't do that if you find out he is married."

"And now I'll tell you something. That 'Baby' is here."

"What 'Baby'?"

"The one that followed us out of London. It was behind us for ten miles. Then you made me decrease speed, and it passed us, but the man got out at a pub a little further on. I called your attention to the fact. Now he's followed us on here."

"You think we've been followed; but what the devil for?"

"Don't know, sir. It may be another Bolshi plot."

"Good Heavens, Billy—you think the world is run on the lines of the talkies."

"I wasn't so wrong about that Macmillan case."

"I solved that little problem."

"With the help of your humble servant."

"Off you go, Billy. I'll look after the 'Baby's' master. You absorb yourself in the village—

and, Billy, I've changed my mind. I will go to Linchester to-morrow myself. How far is it?"

"I will look it up on the map. It may be as much as thirty-five miles."

"Good! We start at seven and should be there by nine. We leave it at ten and shall be back here by twelve."

"By eleven-thirty," said Billy.

"At twelve I expect Lady Brassingham to call."

## CHAPTER VIII

## I LOOK ROUND

HAVING got rid of Billy I had a wash and a brush up. I went downstairs, and consulted the visitors' book in the hall. The name immediately above mine was G. E. Pickering; his habitat was London, and he was British born. That did not tell me much, but there in the lounge was G. E. Pickering, drinking a late tea, eating buttered toast, and reading the *Daily Intelligence* which he had propped up before him.

"Good afternoon!" said I, "lovely weather."

"Very," said G. E. Pickering, looking up from his paper with a smile.

"The mayfly must be now on the water. Have you had any sport?"

"I have only just arrived."

"So have I. I have heard this is a comfortable old inn."

"It seems to be so," said G. E. Pickering, putting a big piece of buttered toast into his

mouth, and filling up his cup. He then turned to the *Daily Intelligence*.

I went to the table and selected an old *Graphic*. A man looking at the *Graphic* is always ready for conversation, a man reading *The Times* is not. I don't know what the social reaction of a man with the *Daily Intelligence* ought to be, but it was clear that G. E. Pickering was not at the moment prepared to chat.

The *Graphic* has another advantage. No one can be expected to study it continuously. You turn the pages, glance at the pictures, and there is nothing surprising if half your time you are glancing at something, or someone else. I was trying to take in and place G. E. Pickering.

Age about thirty-five. Closely clipped hair and moustache. Tanned and well-shaven cheeks, strong hands but manicured, clothes not new, but certainly not shabby. Cuffs, collar, tie and socks not striking but suggest care—brown shoes, old and comfortable. Now who is he and what is he doing here in the middle of June? He has the air of a military man. He is not old enough to be the parent of one of the girls. He is not old enough to take a loafing holiday. Supposing him a mad fisherman would

he have come to a place like this without a pal? If he is a retired soldier and poor, in June he would be at work, or looking for a job. If he is rich why has he left London in the middle of June? He certainly does not look as if he were ever ill. He's not the sort of man doctors send away for a rest cure. And then there is the ridiculous suggestion of Billy, that he followed us out of London. Billy's suspicions are becoming fantastic.

Next I heard someone outside: "Look here, Robinson, I am leaving my waders here."

"Certainly, sir, is your car in the garage?"

"No, I'm walking. Rotten day—I haven't caught a thing."

A youngish man pushed open the door and came into the lounge and stared at us, talking over his shoulder to Robinson the while.

"Tell you what it is—this water is over-fished—too many Cockney sportsmen about."

With another insolent stare in our direction he went out.

"Well!" I remarked, "I came to-day from London, but I'm no Cockney—born on the land."

"Same here," said Mr. Pickering, and added—"A bit of a bounder, I should think."

He took up his newspaper again, and I left the room to meet an apologetic-looking Robinson.

"And who is that—gentleman?" I asked.

"Young Mr. Welman, of Parton Hall," he replied. "His mother bought Parton Hall after the war, when Mr. Greswell had to sell, poor gentleman."

"Not much of a sportsman, I should say."

"Well, sir, perhaps not. He wasn't bred to it, you see. He's always over here. So is his mother. She goes to the Hall whenever they have a meeting or a match, and when there's nothing on he comes over with messages from his mother."

"I see—I understand Lady Dorothy Poynings is a very charming woman."

"She's a lady, sir," said Robinson with some asperity, as he noted my insinuation—and then, bethinking himself, he added in an altogether different tone, "and you never know what a lady mayn't do."

"That is true," said I, and leaving Robinson to reflect on the ways of women in his doorway, I passed into the garden. From there I could see Mr. Welman entering the park gates, and I uttered a prayer that for his soul's good he might meet with Lady Brassingham.

For a man like myself, bred and born on a farm, but bound to live in Brixton and work chiefly in a town, this coming into a village garden was like a return home. I sat down on one of the uncomfortable green chairs, and contemplated the straggling rose bushes, the rather untidy clump of peonies, where the great flowers were bending to the earth, borne down by their weight, the one splendid delphinium with its blue spires pointing to the heavens, and the blue and white campanulas in a row beside the wall. Then I got up and walked to the wall to look at the gently running water. I looked at the bridge where two old men with pipes in their mouths were looking down into the stream. They had come to that bridge and done the same thing, day by day for years. I knew that, and could think of nothing better—to surrender oneself to the continuing fascination of the moving surface. Yes! And there was a fish rising—a good-sized one also. It was lying, nose up stream, near that dimly discerned stone. There it was again! I felt I knew the fly which would be an undeniable temptation. If only I had a rod with me.

Just then I heard a voice behind me. It

was Pickering in the middle of the road, looking this way and that. He asked something of Robinson, still in the doorway, and then turned briskly, crossed the bridge, went up the road, and entered the park gates.

"Dear me," said I, "he must know the lady well if he is thinking of calling on her after six o'clock. If she were at home I wonder if she would ask him to dine with the girls, and whether Mr. Welman would be sitting on the other side of her."

The sight of Pickering brought me back to business. I went upstairs and wrote a brief report to Scotland Yard, sealed it carefully and took it myself to the little post office up the village street. I then returned and had an interesting talk with Robinson about fishing, and the right flies. Robinson was an angler himself, and I convinced him that I belonged to the fraternity. Then he showed me in the hall a beautiful light rod of split cane which Pickering had brought with him. He named a famous firm in Pall Mall, and made but one comment—"It has never been used."



## CHAPTER IX

## MAJOR PICKERING

"As we seem the only guests in the house, I wonder if you would care to sit at my table," I said to Pickering.

"With pleasure," he replied.

"They have some really fine port here, but I can't manage a bottle."

"I will share that also," said Pickering with quite a friendly smile.

The dinner was good, though plain. Prime roast beef and well-cooked vegetables. The gooseberry tart, with plenty of thick cream, was excellent. The cheese, butter and biscuits were all that a man could desire. Lastly, with the apples and walnuts, came the port; and we each ate half of an apple before filling our glasses. It was a wine worth waiting for—a wine to be drunk with deliberation by friends.

By the time we had reached this stage, Pickering and myself were on the best of terms.

I had found out that he was a Major, that he knew nothing of the neighbourhood, and less about fishing. I found also that he had been curious enough to ascertain my name from the visitors' book, and was still at a loss to place me. He was wondering what I could be, and why I was there; how it was I knew so much about the life he knew, and yet was so certainly not of his world.

"A fine old place, Poynings Hall," I remarked, "I saw you going up there."

"Have you been there also," he said, hardly disguising his surprise?

"I have a daughter."

"At the school?"

"Not yet, I am considering possibilities."

"I see," he remarked. "I know Lady Dorothy Poynings, but she is apparently not at home."

"So I found out when I went over the school this afternoon."

"Do you know, I met that young bounder in the drive?"

"He can't have a daughter at the school. He isn't old enough."

"He had the impudence to stop me. He said, 'Do you know you are trespassing?' This is

private property.' I said: 'I know I am on Lady Dorothy Poynings' property, and I am going to pay her a call.' 'Oh, well, you needn't go on. I have just come from the house, and she is not at home.' 'Thank you,' said I, 'but I think I will go on and leave a card.' I thought, you see, she might not be 'at home' to that young man."

"I hope you did not say that. The lady might not like it."

"Of course not—I left school some years ago. There are some disadvantages in age. You must not make the schoolboy score, and you must not kick your adversary in the appropriate place."

Just at that minute an elderly man with a white moustache entered. He was very upright—a Colonel every inch of him. He approached us and said "Good evening", and then chose a place in the corner and drummed on the table with impatience until his dinner came. Pickering and I went on chatting, while he ordered the waiters about, grumbled at his food, and declared that his claret was corked.

Having finished his dinner, he came towards us, "Forgive me, gentlemen, but I am the oldest inhabitant—I am Colonel Constable, of

the Rawal Pindi Rifles. This, I may say, is my headquarters—it suits me. I fish—I have a bit of rough shooting later on. There's a golf course within five miles, and I can get up to the Club in an hour and a half. It's not so bad as Cheltenham or Tunbridge Wells—no old cats here. A little dull sometimes. By the way, do you gentlemen play bridge?”

We did not feel inclined for dummy bridge, and said so. The Colonel hid his disappointment and sat down with us. We soon heard his opinion of Lord Chelmsford and Mr. Montague. It was quite unprintable. We also learnt that the Colonel really thought that the Labour Ministry was composed of men who had hitherto worked with pick and shovel. “Good enough chaps in their way, no doubt, somebody has to do the coolie work—but that they should rule us—good Lord, man, it's clean against nature. They say at the Senior, etc. . . .” We heard a good deal about the emphatic views of “The Senior” in the course of the evening.

“I suppose you gentlemen,” he said suddenly, “are not interested in our local gossip, but you happen to have arrived at a moment of great excitement. Waiter, another double

whisky—wait a minute—mustn't talk while he is in the room—I said a double—take that back and bring me what I ordered—that's better. You can go. Yes, go to bed, I shan't want you any more. Now what was I saying when we were interrupted? I know, I was telling you how the schoolmistress had run away."

"Run away," said Major Pickering. "What schoolmistress?"

"That Lady Dorothy Poynings up at the hall. She's bolted—a very fine young woman, too—quite extraordinary! But then an Earl's daughter ought not to keep a school. It's against nature. No one like that kept a school when I was young. Bless you, they didn't know enough. You see what comes of all this education of women."

"And who has she bolted with?" I asked.

"Now that's what's puzzling everyone. She went away by herself last Saturday, and has not been heard of since. The servants are all on the twitter up at the Park, and the governesses are just distracted. I looked in at the Post Office on my way home. I was a bit late, but I wanted some stamps. The postmistress told me that someone had been writing to the

Chief Inspector at Scotland Yard, so it's likely to be a first-rate scandal."

"I think I ought to tell you, Colonel, that Lady Dorothy Poynings is a great friend of mine," said Major Pickering.

"My dear fellow, I didn't know that. I wouldn't have said a word about it. After all, what is it—village gossip. You don't know how they chatter in a place like this. Talk about the Indian bazaars! Poynings could give them points in the way of invention. How any decent person can condescend to repeat the sort of rot they say, beats me altogether. Well, gentlemen, I expect we shall see the Lady Dorothy coming gaily down the hill to the bridge to-morrow morning, and then won't all the Paul Prys look small?"

## CHAPTER X

## KITCHEN GOSSIP

GOING up to bed, I met Robinson at the foot of the stairs, and stopped.

"I shall be off for a motor drive to-morrow morning at 7, and want to be called at 6. Will you send my man up to my room? I will give him his orders before I go to bed."

"You are coming back, sir."

"Yes! On the chance of seeing Lady Brassingham. I think I told you that she might be at Poynings. If you can lend me a rod I may fish in the afternoon."

"Has Lady Dorothy returned to the Hall with Lady Brassingham, sir?"

"I don't know—I don't know Lady Dorothy—but I daresay you are right. I was disappointed not to see her at the school this afternoon, but the lady I saw—what's her name—Miss Dampier—did not tell me when she was expected."

"I wonder what her little game is."

"Whose? Miss Dampier's? I thought her a most capable lady."

"Yes, sir—I've known her a long time—in the old Earl's days—we servants know things."

"I see," said I, in my most encouraging manner.

"But there—least said soonest mended. Good-night, sir."

A few minutes later Billy arrived in my room.

"Now then, what have you learnt in this gossip shop?"

"There's plenty of talk, but very little gossip."

"I see—a speculative society."

"I daresay! It seems to me all Poynings is in for a guessing competition."

"Well, let's hear what they think."

"Well, the Colonel—that's the old bloke downstairs—told the postmistress that of course she had gone off with some man, and the village idiot thought it must be with Mr. Welman, a gentleman who does not seem to be popular hereabouts, but was always going up to the Hall. That, however, is a wash out. The gay Lothario was fishing here this afternoon, and



couldn't believe the parlour-maid at the Park when she said 'Not at home' this afternoon. I guess Lady Dorothy was often 'Not at home' when he called.

"Next, there's the village schoolmaster—he's a bright lad! He's been teaching them all about the white slave trade."

"Silly fool—worse than the village idiot."

"Then, there's the dear old Rector. They all call him 'the dear old Rector' here. His parlour-maid was housemaid at the Hall in the old Earl's days, and is a friend of Mrs. Robinson, who was housekeeper then—a humble friend—I saw that. Well, she came in to-night, and she told us that the dear old Rector is sure that Lady Dorothy has been run over by a taxi. He was run over by one himself the last time he was in town. But his wife says—'Nonsense, Robert, Dorothy has all her wits about her. All this talk is nonsense—dear Dorothy is just having a few days in town, and her letter telling Miss Dampier has miscarried. After all, Dorothy is Irish—I expect she put it into her pocket and forgot to post it.'"

"Now that's plausible, but I'm sure it's not true."

"No! and it isn't the popular explanation

either. Most of the village prefer to think of murder, suicide or abduction."

"No one but you think it's a Bolshi plot."

"I don't think that really—but I'm still suspicious of that 'Baby'."

"The man's a Major, a gentleman and I think a lover. He was awfully upset when the Colonel downstairs blurted out the disappearance."

"Poor chap! He's gone to bed, wondering who the lucky chap can be who has made off with his bride. I say, sir, we don't often deal in romance. Do you think he will drop into poetry?"

"Now that you are engaged to marry my daughter, I don't like to hear you being flippant on the subject of matrimony."

"I wonder what the dignified old body downstairs would say if she knew of our relationship?"

"Meaning Mrs. Robinson? How did you get into her confidence?"

"Oh, she's not above talking to some chauffeurs. Not that she would demean herself by saying more than 'Good-day' to a taxi-driver—but a private chauffeur of a very fast car with quiet and deferential manners is different. Besides, with all her starch, the old

lady is very curious about you. I gave you quite a good character, sir; and she gave me a first-rate supper in her private room."

"And what did you tell her about me?"

"I was a little confused about your business, but I think the old girl is now under the impression that you are the Director of some Insurance Society. I told her that you insured people against sudden death, burglary and destruction by the King's enemies. I told her that we live just off Whitehall, and that fully satisfied her. She asked 'Were you very rich?' And, as a very superior chauffeur who has been in better service, I said 'Oh dear no! but I shouldn't call him a poor man, and all he's got he's made himself.'"

"Hm! That will allay the suspicions of old Robinson. Close old dog that. He was just going to tell me something about Miss Dampier, but thought better of it."

Oh, I can tell you. The old girl and the Rectory parlour-maid didn't half give the Damper a character. She was governess to Lady Dorothy, and they hated her. Then, when the Countess died, the Damper set her cap at the disconsolate widower. Lord Castle-kerry was very fond of his children, and the

Damper was always on the spot. If he took the children about, of course she had to go too. He had no use for her at all, but he was a good-natured Irishman, and he did not know how to keep out of her way. So people began to talk. Then Mrs. Robinson, being housekeeper, and having been schoolroom maid when Lady Brassingham was a girl, presumed to write that lady a letter to tell her what was going on, and Lady Brassingham arrived next day and persuaded the Earl that the children wanted country air. So the Damper and the children were carried off to Suffolk, and the Damper found herself shut up in the nursery wing. 'Lady Brassingham,' said Mrs. Robinson, 'didn't often ask her to dine with the family downstairs.' "

"Now that's interesting. Did you hear anything about Miss Le Fanu?"

"No! She is just 'Staff'. The people down here only know Lady Dorothy and Miss Dampier. The rest are just 'Staff.' So the young ladies are just 'The Girls' except the Duke's daughter. Mrs. Robinson did know her. It seems that the Duke and Duchess came to stay for the half-term holiday, and put up here. It was an event for the Robinsons—the precious child was allowed to come to lunch, and stayed

until after dinner, and surveyed the premises from the coal hole to the attics. When it was time for her to go back to bed, she had long and protracted farewells with her parents, and then she would not go away without saying good-bye to Mrs. Robinson, who had been so kind to her. In that way she managed to get into the back premises, where she snaffled all that remained of the dessert, and carried it off for a midnight feast with her little friends. She's some child, that!"

"Likely to prove a worthy member of an effete aristocracy?"

"Effete fiddlesticks," said Billy.

"Well, you must not fall in love with her. Go and dream of my daughter Mary, and remember that we start punctually at seven o'clock."

## CHAPTER XI

## BILLY IS SULKY

AT seven o'clock I had finished breakfast and came out of the inn door. My car was ready, and Billy was at the door, looking rather sulky, as he always does in the early morning. The Baby Austin was also coming out of the garage with Major Pickering inside.

I went up to him and said, "Surely you are not leaving."

"Yes, I've changed my mind. I've remembered that I have an important engagement in town."

"Well, then, I shouldn't go. Let me show you my card."

He looked at it, and at me with some surprise. "I don't understand," was all he said.

"I am here to find out what has become of Lady Dorothy Poynings."

"But she isn't here."

"No! but I am going to find her, and this is my headquarters for the present."

"And you think that I am interested in her whereabouts?"

"I know you are, and if you want the earliest intelligence, you had better spend the morning in fishing."

"I say, it's awfully good of you to tell me."

"Yes, but don't tell the Colonel or the Robinsons, or anyone else. Nobody wants a scandal. That's why I am here incog."

"Now you have given yourself away properly," said the sulky Billy.

"Not at all! I've sized up my man. He knows nothing about fishing, and not as much as you would expect about port. Otherwise he's all right. Now stop, and you can walk back to the Post Office and drop this missive in the box."

"You might have told me before."

"No! If we had stopped at the door, the post-mistress would have known where the letter came from. The box is this side of the house and you can post the letter without passing the window."

Billy went back grumbling the hundred yards, and was still irritated when he asked, "And what was in that little billet-doux?"

"It was written on official paper and addressed to the postmistress, Poynings. Inside I had written:

" 'MADAM,

" 'Last night a letter was addressed to the Chief Inspector, Scotland Yard. Soon afterwards the fact was known all over the village. It will be necessary in consequence to communicate this to the authorities.

" 'Yours faithfully,

" 'A. FROST, C.I.D.'

"All is clear except the signature, and I would defy anyone to decipher that."

"Poor old woman! Why did you do that? She will get the sack."

"Not this time. I shall tell the Yard, of course, to be careful, but the Post Office? Well, no—it is bad enough to deal with one Public Department. I don't want to spend the rest of my life filling up forms, interviewing inspectors, replying to memos., and initialing minutes. If Poynings finds their local postmistress a gossip, its for them to complain. Directly I've finished this inquiry it's no concern of mine."



"Then why write the letter?"

"I thought the good lady would be all the better for a salutary morning of repentance. And I thought that she might be more ready to answer questions in the afternoon if she was anxious to save her bacon."

"What can she tell you?"

"I don't know. Addresses perhaps, post-marks, telegrams, what not."

"In fact you are going to tempt her to do what she ought not."

"It is all in the cause of justice, Billy. How sulky and censorious you are early in the morning!"

## CHAPTER XII

## A LINCHESTER MASTER

CONSIDERING the fact that I called upon the headmaster of Linchester at eight-forty-five, before he had finished his breakfast, I had no reason to complain of my reception. He told me that the Earl of Castlekerry had left the school before his time. He turned up his register and said:

"He was here from 1912-1917. He only reached the Lower Sixth, and was not in either of the teams. He was in Macmillan's—but, wait a minute, Mr. Macmillan only took over the House in 1916, so after seeing him you had better call on Mr. Pearson, his predecessor. He is no longer on the staff, but he lives only a few yards further up the road. He, I know, likes to talk about his old boys. He is the repository of our Linchester traditions."

Five minutes later I was shown into Mr. Macmillan's study, and was face to face with

its owner. He was a tall, raw-boned man, with a square jaw which was imperfectly shaved. He wore a close-clipped moustache, and his hair was iron grey. He was leaning against the mantelpiece and did not move or take his bull-dog pipe out of his mouth as I entered. His room was the untidiest I have seen. There was a great writing table in the window at which it would have been impossible to write. I sat down by it and noted its confusion. There were piles of foolscap papers on it, apparently thrown down anyhow. There was a litter of letters—also a brown tobacco jar, two golf balls, an inkstand, a propped-up calendar and a mortar-board. I had no time to observe more, for Mr. Macmillan did not waste time.

"You are Inspector Frost, of Scotland Yard? What do you want with me?"

"I have been hoping that you may be able to tell me something about the Earl of Castlekerry."

"Why should I know anything about him? He left more than a dozen years ago."

"Schoolmasters often keep in touch with their old boys."

"With some of them. Tell me, what do you want him for? What has he been doing?"

"That is what I want to know."

"Has he been passing fraudulent cheques, or is he in the Divorce Court?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Well, what is it for? He must have been doing something. You people don't worry yourselves over unoffending citizens."

"It is sometimes necessary to trace them."

"But that's not a job for Scotland Yard. You broadcast for them, or insert something in the Agony column of *The Times*."

"Perhaps! But you can take it from me, sir, that Scotland Yard knows its own business."

"So do I for that matter. Has he come into money? If so, I would like to know. He might subscribe to our new laboratories."

"You can give me no clue to where he is? Do you think that Mr. Pearson might help me?"

"He might, but it's not likely. I can't make out why you came here. . . . Yes, Harland, you may come in. I'm ready for you. This gentleman is going. Just take him to the door and show him where Mr. Pearson lives. Good-morning, sir."

During these parting words, Mr. Macmillan had swung the chair on which I had been

sitting into the unoccupied space in the middle of the room. Before I reached the door he was drawing a cane from a huddle of sticks and golf clubs in the corner.

Harland was a fat little boy of about fourteen, and had—I expect temporarily—a very nervous manner. He pointed out where Mr. Pearson lived, and in thanking him I could think of nothing better to add than the one word, “Cheerio.”

Harland made a brave effort to smile, and most unwillingly blushed. He went back to an even more unpleasant interview than I had had with Mr. Macmillan, and I could only hope it would be more to his ultimate benefit.

## CHAPTER XIII

## ANOTHER LINCHESTER MASTER

MR. PEARSON'S study was indeed a contrast to the one which I had left. On his writing table there was nothing but a clean sheet of blotting paper, and a tall, closed case which no doubt contained stationery. There was a thick Turkey carpet and deep arm-chairs. On a little table by one of them was a pile of unopened letters and *The Times* newspaper properly folded. Book cases surrounded the walls, with well-bound volumes obviously in order. Plaster casts stood above them, and there was an oil painting over the mantelpiece which seemed odd enough to be an old master. All that was wanting was Mr. Pearson.

A great album stood on a table in the centre of the room, which I ventured to open. It was full of signed photographs of boys, and some of them did not write very well when they gave their master their portraits. Some

were in uniform, and Mr. Pearson had added the dates of their deaths. Several had affectionate inscriptions. Still there was no Mr. Pearson.

It was fully ten minutes before he hurried into the room—a little round, active cleric with a bald head set off by silvery white hair. He looked so nice and clean, as if he had just come from a bath, as if his linen had just come from the laundress; there was a shine on his boots and his clothes were speckless.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Inspector! Coming on the King's business, too—most improper of me. Detectives don't often call here. It's quite alarming—and so early in the morning, when I have not had my breakfast. I hope, Inspector, you haven't breakfasted either."

I assured him that I had had a good meal two and a half hours earlier.

"As long ago as that, and had a long journey since. You must be hungry again. Come and have a second breakfast with me. I am not good for anything until I've had a cup of tea and a bit of toast. After that I can bear anything, even if you've come to arrest me for murder."

There was no resisting this old gentleman. I was led away into his cheerful breakfast-room and he called a servant to provide a second place. We soon sat down to a comfortable meal and I am ashamed to say that I ate with more appetite than he did, but then I had come thirty miles in an open car, and he had only come from his bed. I told him of my errand, and of my interview with Mr. Macmillan, and he chuckled, saying, "So like him!"

"You see," he went on, "I am not busy like Macmillan—I am on the shelf, with plenty of time for reminiscences. At seventy one's greatest pleasure is in reviewing old times—though, mind you, I am not quite seventy yet."

"Now about Poynings—he was Lord Poynings when he came here. He afterwards succeeded to the Earldom, and I fear very little else. He left a dozen years ago—and—well, it is characteristic of him—I have never heard from him since."

"What was wrong about him?"

"Nothing! Quite a good boy, but—how shall I put it? Not a good Public School boy. We pedagogues, of course, have a standard—



quite a good standard—and we expect boys to conform to it. Sometimes they don't, that's all. Now there was Poynings. He was here five years, and he never even pretended to care for Linchester. Most extraordinary, but there it is. He might have been a fine athlete. I have watched him coming down the touch-line at football; he had perhaps the most beautiful natural swerve I can remember, but he never got into the team. He simply didn't care. Again he had brains—not brilliant perhaps—but certainly above the average. He might have been a scholar, but I don't think he got into the Sixth—a very great pity. His life here was wasted—just because he did not share our interests.”

“Lazy, I suppose.”

“Not at all. In work or play he did what he was called on to do and then went his own way. He was fond of long walks—sometimes, I fear, out of bounds. He was very fond of natural history, and I don't think he could have known more about farming if he had been born in a foal-yard. The boys called him ‘Farmer George,’ and, bless you, he didn't mind. Funny that he should have been like that. Funny that he should have left and

never written to me. We were quite good friends while he was here, and, forgive my vanity, I rather pride myself on knowing what all my old boys are doing. I am so sorry that I can't tell you more about Poynings, or where he is. I suppose I was a failure so far as he was concerned."

"He left in 1917. He ought to have gone into the Army."

"Of course he ought," said Mr. Pearson, and he rose to find his School War Record. "Now that is odd—very odd—there is no record of his serving. Fancy my never looking him up before."

"Did he make any friends here, who would be likely to know of his whereabouts?"

"Let me see! He was generally liked, but I can't think, for a minute, of any particular friend. Pickering was a year older than he was, but he is more likely to know of him than anyone else. Pickering is a Major in the Blues. He received a D.S.O. in the War when very young. You will easily find him."

"Yes! I think I can find Major Pickering all right."

"You know him, Inspector? A delightful boy. He was head of my house—a splendid

influence! So keen, too, on his old school. Comes down here most terms and always comes to see me—just to have a long chat over old times. Schoolmasters live so much out of the world. It is our old boys who keep us in touch with life. It is so good of them not to forget us.”

“I can’t imagine anyone wanting an unnecessary interview with Mr. Macmillan.”

“Now there you wrong him, Inspector. He is a little rough in manner perhaps—he comes from the North, but he cares for his boys all right. They know that, and he has a great reputation as a disciplinarian.”

“That I can believe,” said I, and I told him about Master Harland.

“Dear me,” said Mr. Pearson. “Now I wonder what that jolly little beggar has been up to. I can remember a similar unpleasant interview which his father had with me thirty years ago. A terrible little ragamuffin his father was. He is a K.C. now. I am so glad you told me about little Harland, I will ask him to tea on Sunday and hear all about it.”

“You must not give me away.”

“Dear me, no! It’s not necessary. I am a Linchester institution, but I am no longer

on the staff. These dear boys are very good to me. They come and tell me all that is going on—all the silly things about themselves and their sillier jokes about their masters. I like it. I was a schoolmaster so long, and I am not a schoolmaster now. I like to know things all the same, and they are not afraid to talk."

"I am sure, sir, that you are very good to them."

"Nonsense! My day is over. I can't do much, but I am still interested in the young. Besides, you know if these boys get into the habit of talking to an old foggy like me, it comes easier to tell me about it if real trouble comes along. They do now and again, and sometimes I can help a little. It makes me feel not quite useless, you know! But there! Don't think I am bragging or setting myself up as a professional father confessor—nothing of the sort—though I know what you'll say to yourself directly you get outside: 'He pretends to be a boy's confidant, but when I asked him about the only boy in whom I am interested, he could tell me nothing'."

"Not quite nothing, Mr. Pearson. You have done what you could for me and I am grateful."

## CHAPTER XIV

## BILLY IS DEPRESSED

"WELL," said Billy, as we drove back to Poynings, "did you have any luck?"

"No!" said I, "but I have now an idea of Lord Castlekerry, and I have fixed Major Pickering—the man with the Baby Austin—he was a prize boy at that school."

"I always hated prize boys. It's very suspicious, sir. Prize boys get on the right side of teachers, and then do what they like."

"Possibly, you are right. I can remember one of your teachers in Camberwell—a man named Gordon—speaking very highly of you."

"He was the only teacher I ever had who was a man of real discernment."

"Personally I am sorry that you were not brought up by the Mr. Macmillan I interviewed

this morning. But enough of that, we are not getting on very fast."

"Fifty miles to the hour at the moment."

"I mean this case."

"Yes, it isn't exciting, and it seems a silly sort of stunt. You don't expect a school-mistress to shoot the moon, and if she does you think she's a lunatic. I suppose, sir, you don't think the Duke's daughter was such a handful that she has dropped her and fled? Anyhow, why should we trouble to find her? I suppose hide and seek is all right in girls' schools, but it's beneath the dignity of Scotland Yard to play at 'I spy'."

"Thought that was what we were always doing."

"Yes with murderers, Bolshies, burglars and the exponents of big business, but a girls' school. Heavens! If it wasn't for the Duke's daughter I should be fed up."

"Quite right, Billy. You can take the car back this afternoon. There's nothing for you to do in this case. I shall stay on until I find Lady Dorothy Poynings."

"What's the use of it?"

"It should be impossible that any woman should be lost in England; and it must never be

said that Scotland Yard cannot put their hands on anyone who is wanted."

"And, if I see Mrs. Frost this evening, how long shall I tell her that you will be away?"

"Two, or at the outside, three days."

## CHAPTER XV

## AN EMERGENCY HEAD MISTRESS

ON returning to the "Fisherman's Arms" at eleven-thirty I went out into the garden. I could see Major Pickering, not fishing, but flogging the water some way down the stream. It is, I thought, still more difficult to fish for a head mistress. That Lady Dorothy Poynings should have disappeared was remarkable, but that she should have disappeared with her secretary was really mysterious. It cut out most of the explanations which might be considered. Then her father had disappeared—at least he had been reported missing and presumed to be dead. Lastly, her brother was missing. There were three missing links, and they might all three hang together, but where the dickens did Miss Le Fanu come in? Did Major Pickering know? Then something clicked in my brain. I saw that Monte Carlo snap shot with Lady Dorothy and Miss Le



Fanu on either side of a man? The man was Major Pickering.

Presently, I saw Lady Brassingham coming out of the park gates, walking deliberately with the ebony stick in the very middle of the road. She crossed the bridge, nodded to me across the garden wall very like a man, and passed up the road to the front door of the inn. I had to wait some ten minutes before she came out into the garden, and then, jerking her head towards the house, she said: "They're inquisitive in there."

"So I imagined."

"I've told them that Dorothy is having a short rest cure, and that I had come down to look after the school."

"That must have surprised them."

"Not so much as it surprised that Dampier woman. You see, I have established my privilege to do odd things. They're inquisitive about you also. I've told them that you are concerned with my late husband's business—brewing. So that's all right!"

"I fancy Sergeant Smith, who has been masquerading as my chauffeur, gave them to understand that I was Director of an Insurance Company."

"Oh, it doesn't matter what he said, now I've come."

"Now, Lady Brassingham, before anything else, do you mind answering a question. Where is Lord Castlekerry?"

"I don't know," she replied irritably. "Here am I, an old woman, with no children and money to burn; and here are my own brother's son and daughter—my nearest relatives—both too proud and independent to have anything to do with me. I can't think where they get it from. Castlekerry would have given anyone his last shilling, and borrowed another to make it a florin, and Molly was the sweetest woman who ever walked."

"I had been wondering, though to say it may be an impertinence, whether the late Lord Castlekerry's marriage had made a rift in the family."

"Nonsense! No one ever dared to say a word against Molly. Castlekerry married her before all the world in Brompton Oratory, and there were her old parents in the front pew. Her father was a fisherman and her mother wept all the time because Molly was marrying a Protestant. She couldn't think of anything else."

"I have been told it was a happy marriage."

"Of course it was. Everybody loved Molly. What tales she used to tell, and how she made us laugh about the things she used to do when she was a barefooted lassie on the shores of Galway. Then she went to a convent school where she learnt to dance, and convinced the nuns that she hadn't what they called 'a vocation.' So, somehow or other she got on to the London stage and there Castlekerry met her."

"Is Lady Dorothy Poynings a Roman Catholic?"

"No! She was brought up one, but after her mother died she went to Oxford. I don't know what happened. She read history and quarrelled with her priest. I suppose she read the wrong history, or the Priest thought she did. Anyhow, she joined the Church of England, and Castlekerry was ever so pleased, until he went one Sunday to church with her. Then he came straight home and wrote a letter to the *Morning Post*. That church, he said, was degrees worse than Popery. He and Dorothy didn't go to church together any more."

"Can you tell me anything about Miss Le Fanu?"

"Never heard of her before yesterday."

"You will find her photograph on the mantelpiece of Lady Dorothy's room. It is a snapshot taken at Monte Carlo. The man you see down there, pretending that he's fishing, is also in it."

"Is he the Mr. Welman, of whom Mrs Robinson has been speaking?"

"No, a Major Pickering, of the Blues."

"Really—Pickering—I ought to know him. I have him on my list I know. I suppose he comes to Hill Street, but I could not put a face to him. What is he doing here?"

"I have guessed, it is only a guess, that he came here yesterday to propose to Lady Dorothy. He was terribly upset when a man in the hotel last night suggested that she had bolted. I had some difficulty in persuading him to remain."

"Why couldn't the girl have lived with me in Hill Street, and married the Major or someone else in the ordinary way, instead of fooling about as a schoolmistress."

"A very successful schoolmistress."

"I wonder—I've been through her things. She has plenty of frocks and a good many bills. I should think she has as much idea of

economy as her father and mother. They had none."

"With sixty pupils paying £300 a year apiece you can afford some little extravagances."

"All bunkum," said Lady Brassingham. "I don't know much yet, but I've found out that more than half the girls up there are paying only half fees. Fancy! that Mackintosh, the Whisky man, is educating two daughters on the cheap. There are also a lot of bad debts. Lord St. Julian hasn't paid anything for a year, and isn't likely to do so after his losses on the turf. I am told Redland Towers is to be closed."

"Let us put the income at £12,000 a year. It doesn't cost that to keep up Poynings Hall."

"Can't say. Do you know what the Dampier woman gets? £1,000 a year. Ridiculous! I am on the Council of a Girls' School, and I know you can get a tip-top acting head mistress for half that sum. There are six other members of the staff, all at high salaries. There's a matron and a nurse. Too many maids, and five men outside. The children are well fed—I own that—but I should not be surprised if the waste in the kitchen was prodigious. Then Dorothy must needs have a

secretary, and a chauffeur. It all means money."

"But still, think, £12,000 a year at the least."

"And how much do you suppose she is paying as interest on borrowed money? There were not always sixty girls in the school. For the first three years, at least, the school must have been run at a dead loss. Who financed her? That's what I want to know. She had only £5,000 when she came of age, and she received, perhaps, £3,000 more as her share from the sale of Molly's jewellery."

"There seems to be a good deal for you to investigate up at the Hall."

"And I will, too. Twenty years I lived with Brassingham, and didn't he train me in business methods? But when we have got to the end of the muddle we shan't have found Dorothy."

"We may have found out why she went away."

"What good will that do?"

"It's, perhaps, the first step to finding where, she went to."

"But, bless you, Inspector, she's got to be found at once. You don't seem to have a notion where to look."

"Has your Ladyship?"

"No! but I expect you to find her. It's your business."

"And with your help, I will."

"And what am I to do?"

"I hope your Ladyship will remain at the Hall, though I fear you must be very uncomfortable in such unwonted surroundings."

"Not at all, I am having continual surprises. If it were not for Dorothy being lost I should be enjoying myself. The Dampier woman, of course, tried to hustle me off, and said nothing could be done at the Hall. I said, 'Miss Dampier, will you be good enough to send some dinner at eight o'clock up to Dorothy's room, for it is about time somebody who was a relation looked into her affairs.' That settled her. Then, about half-past six, when I was told they were all at lessons, who should come into the room but a child in pyjamas. She was surprised when she saw me. She said that she thought Dorothy had come back. I, of course, offered to call Miss Dampier. Then a piteous little voice said, 'Please don't. You see I've been sent to bed.' I said sternly: 'Then why aren't you there?' What's your name? She said,

'Angela—Angela Altamont'. She's the daughter of the Duke of Bedminster, and just like what her mother was as a child, and quite as naughty. I packed her off all right to bed. Well, as a matter of fact, I carried her upstairs and tucked her up. Very silly of me, but she did look so forlorn, with her little bare feet."

"I suppose she had come downstairs for Lady Dorothy to comfort her."

"When I was young, head mistresses did not comfort naughty children. They boxed their ears."

"I imagine it is no easy job to be a head mistress."

"It isn't—I found that out this morning when I began."

"You, Lady Brassingham!"

"Yes! Am I not here as Dorothy's representative? Of course I am mistress. I woke up this morning and said to myself: 'I have done most things in life. I have flown in the air and been down in a submarine. I have faced an Irish mob and managed a V.A.D. hospital. I have been a Lady in Waiting, and now I'll be a mistress of a Girls' School'."

"So I got up when the bell rang; but, not knowing the ways of the house, the Dampier



woman got in before me and read prayers in the hall. Then we went in to breakfast, and I went to the top of the room. The girls all stood at the long tables and said, 'Good morning, Miss Dampier,' all together. Then I said 'Now say, Good morning, Lady Brassingham'. They said it, not quite all together—but they will improve. Then I went on, 'Lady Dorothy is obliged to be absent for a few days and I have come to take her place'."

"Sensation! You could feel the thrill I gave those girls. The staff did not know which way to look, and the Dampier woman was livid as we sat down to breakfast.

"She asked in an acid tone if I meant to teach, and I said 'Certainly—I was aware that Dorothy's absence must entail extra work on the staff, and that I was sorry to see how overstrained Miss Dampier was.' She said that Lady Dorothy took the Juniors in History at 9.15, and she reminded me that Dorothy had taken a First class in that subject at Oxford. All I said was, 'I imagine the juniors are not going in for that examination at present.' Then she went on, 'At 10.5 Dorothy taught a class in the Middle School'. 'What?' I asked. 'French,' said Miss Dampier. 'Certainly,' said I.

I had been fairly scared by the thought that she might say 'Arithmetic'. 'Then,' said Miss Dampier, 'there is an interval of a quarter of an hour'; and after looking at the time-table she said reluctantly: 'Lady Dorothy is not in school from 11.15 to 12. We lunch at 1.15.' By the way, Inspector, what is the time?"

"Five minutes to one."

"Then you must walk a part of the way back with me if you are interested in my work as a school teacher."

We passed through the inn, out into the road before Lady Brassingham resumed her story.

"There's a half holiday this afternoon, and I've earned it. I asked, when the girls were sent to me, who ought to be punished. Miss Dampier said, there were none. Looking at those sixty girls, I didn't believe her, but I didn't press the point, for I don't in the least know how you punish school girls.

"So I borrowed the history book, and it was dull. I wonder why school histories are dull. I suppose it is because the really interesting things in history are the bad things people have done—most of them quite improper for infant minds. My infants were revising the Norman Kings, and we got along all right with

William the Conqueror. Then I asked a little girl when William II came to the throne, and she said 1087. I said 'Next, next, next' all round the form, and some of the children guessed centuries away. Then I discovered 1087 was right. That little wretch, Angela, giggled, but I said it was necessary sometimes to see if children really knew, and I was sorry to see that several of them could be tempted into guessing.

"To enliven things after that, I asked if Lady Dorothy had ever told them that we Poynings were descended from Sir Walter Tyrrell. She hadn't. I don't know why we are so proud of the fact, for it is clear that the man was either a shocking bad shot, or he was an assassin. Then I saw that Angela sniggering, and whispering to the little creature next to her, who is Joan something or other. I don't know what she said, but I was down on her at once: 'Do you know whom you are descended from, Angela? From a profiteer who made a great fortune by selling rotten cheese to the fleet which beat the Spanish Armada. It was all in a paper I read a month ago.' All the girls laughed, and Angela looked like a young tiger-cat for the rest of the lesson. So we came

to the King who never smiled again after eating too many lampreys.

"I believe that's wrong, but my history is a little sketchy, though I thought my class a great success. I stood by the door as the children filed out, and this is what I heard in the passage: 'Oh, Squirt! Isn't she priceless?' And then there came a sob—'He didn't sell rotten cheeses. He fought on Drake's own ship. We have his picture in the long gallery, and his armour in the hall. Bobby and I have played at the Armada hundreds of times, so we ought to know. She's a lying old cat!' Sob—sob—sob! I didn't know what to do, so I didn't do anything. It's a mistake to be funny with children."

"Then I suppose the story wasn't true."

"Of course not, but I cut it out of a Society paper all right and sent it to George—that's the Duke. He didn't sob. He wanted the life blood of the editor. Dukes who live in the country ten months in the year do take themselves so seriously. But I must make it up with Angela. In my time no one ever apologised to children—but the silly child did sob so. Thinking of it quite spoilt my French class."

"As it is a half holiday, you might, after an apology, take her out to tea at the 'Fisherman's Arms' with some little friend. Robinson has a bed of early strawberries, and I may have some news for your Ladyship this afternoon."

"Very good! Tell Robinson—a children's tea."

We were by this time fifty yards from the Hall, and that awful bell clanged for lunch. Lady Brassingham said good-bye and walked sturdily forward. "I am not going to hurry. They won't dare to begin without me."

## CHAPTER XVI

## I RECRUIT MAJOR PICKERING

"WELL, Major, have you had any sport?" said I, as I sat down beside him.

"No! But what is much more important, have you any news?"

"None worth communicating, but I know more about the lady than I did."

"What do you know?"

"She was not a good economist."

"Who cares?"

"It has a very important bearing on her disappearance. I can't explain just at present, but I want some information from you. You were a friend of Lord Castlekerry at school?"

"How do you know that?"

"Mr. Pearson, of Linchester, told me."

"You have been to Linchester this morning."

"Yes! and it was the only bit of useful information I acquired."

"I don't see that it helps much."

"If we could find the brother, we might find that the sister was with him."

"I have not seen Castlekerry since he left school; and certainly don't know where he is now."

"You are sure you haven't seen him?"

The Major hesitated a moment before saying: "Well, it's like this, but of course I must be wrong. In '21 I was seconded for service in Ireland, and once, going along a hilly road, we turned the corner and found ourselves in an ambush. We fought our way out all right. The beggars ran away. That was like the Republican Army! There was a man—he was some way off—trying to rally them, and I did think at the time it was Castlekerry, but it couldn't have been."

"At school had he any views on Ireland?"

"He was a strong Home Ruler—but, hang it all, he was a gentleman. He could not have been with that crew."

"Now there is another question. You know Miss Le Fanu? There's a photo of you at the Hall with Lady Dorothy and Miss Le Fanu."

"O yes! I remember the girl—a jolly pretty girl, too—who was with Lady Dorothy when I met them at Monte Carlo."

"Miss Le Fanu was with her when she left Poynings on Saturday."

"Which means?"

"She was not going to commit suicide, and not going away with some man. As she took very little luggage, and left a large wardrobe behind her, I am also of the opinion that she was not going far, and was not going for long. But my opinion doesn't matter. Her disappearance is mysterious and has to be accounted for."

"There may have been an accident. She may have lost her memory."

"The two ladies cannot both have lost their memories at the same time, and Scotland Yard knows all about accidents when identity is unknown. Now what do you know of Miss Le Fanu?"

"Jolly little, I'm afraid. She was travelling with Lady Dorothy. They seemed very friendly, and called one another by their Christian names. Her name was Kathleen. I think I remember hearing that she came from Ireland, and that her father had been shot and her home burnt."

"Was she paying for herself at Monte Carlo, or was she Lady Dorothy's guest?"



"That I cannot tell you. She was not like a paid companion."

"But all this term she has been acting as Lady Dorothy's secretary."

"Funny," said the Major.

"She is probably one key to the mystery, but there's another. I have reason to suspect that that young man we saw yesterday afternoon has been persecuting Lady Dorothy with his attentions. I also hear that his mother, Mrs. Welman, was always over at the Hall. I should like to know more about them, but I am afraid I can't get over to Parton this afternoon, and I have sent the young man who assists me back to town."

"I'll go if you like, but what the dickens am I to do?"

"The place has probably a pub of some sort. The smaller the pub and the earlier in the afternoon you get there the more likely you are to find a publican with nothing to do, and ready for a chat, and to drink a glass for the good of the house. You ask about the fishing there. Say the fishing here is hopeless. Get on to the big house, and ask if Mr. Greswell is still there. He was the late proprietor."

"Greswell—I suppose that's Harry Greswell

in the R.B.—I know he came from this county—first rate fellow!”

“Tell that to the publican, and the odds are you hear all about the Welmans. The old families could do no repairs and were respected. The new people spend money like water and are despised. It’s an odd world, but I’m the son of a small tenant farmer. I was born on the land, and I know how country folk talk.”

## CHAPTER XVII

## THE VILLAGE POSTMISTRESS

LEAVING the inn, I walked up the village street, if you could call it a street. It ran straight up hill, and first there was a row of four or five cottages opening straight on the road. Then a bit of raised pavement in front of a long, white cottage with yellow roses clambering up the walls. Over one of the little windows with square panes were the words "Post Office" in official black on white enamel. The box for letters was on the other side of the door. Next came the shop which spoilt the picturesqueness of the village street—an eyesore you could not avoid. It supplied the villagers with all that they needed from bread to bootlaces and mousetraps. Then there was a genteel cottage, standing back from the road with a good-sized garden, the path to the front door being bordered with flowers, and its hinterlands occupied with cabbages, potatoes and beans. These all

looked out on the stable yard and kitchen garden of the "Fisherman's Arms." Above were a dozen other cottages on either side of the road, and one of them had *County Police* over the door. Lastly, there was a green swing gate and shadowing trees, through which the chimneys of the rectory might be discerned.

I walked straight up the village because a woman was going into the Post Office as I approached it. I gave her plenty of time to buy the entire stock of stamps, but when I returned to what I hoped would be an empty shop, she was still there, and had reached the point of saying:

"It's all very well, Mrs. Evans, but what I say is this—where there's smoke there's fire."

"That's true, Mrs. Hornblower, but——"

"And then there's her aunt—Lady Anne that was—what is she doing here?"

"Well, they do say, she heard of Mr. Welman and came down to break off the match."

"But didn't she marry a brewer herself. I reckon he wasn't much."

"You never know with the gentry what's what."

"No, but you may take my word for it—where's there's smoke there's fire."

"And wise people," said I, "consume their own smoke."

They both started. Mrs. Evans had fully attained the art whereby postmistresses fail to see a customer while they continue their conversations. I had stayed patiently just inside the door, but the bell had rung as I entered.

The postmistress wore spectacles on the very tip of her nose. Her grey hair was exactly parted, and her black gown was a generation out of date. Her chin was pointed, her cheeks had fallen in, and her nervous hands were emaciated. Her chin went up as I spoke, but she still looked over her spectacles. "What do you want?" she asked sharply.

"Never mind," said I. "I can wait until you have served this lady."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Mrs. Hornblower, standing back from the counter, "and I'll thank you in future not to listen to other folks' talk, and not to make remarks which are not called for."

"It's a bad habit, Ma'am, as you say; but as you are going let me open the door for you."

The woman meant to say that she wasn't going, but she caught my compelling eye, and

went. I closed the door, and the postmistress said again—"Now what do you want?"

"I am Inspector Frost, of Scotland Yard."

"Oh! you are the man who wrote that impertinent letter which I received this morning—a pack of lies. Do you think I care what you report? I've asked a dozen people this morning, including the policeman, and they none of them knew a word about the letter you posted last night. You'll find yourself in Queer Street with your own superiors, my man, if you go reporting me. I've been postmistress here these thirty years, and the people of Poynings will stand by me."

Fancy being bluffed by a village postmistress when master criminals have trembled at my approach. But I could bluff, too, and in my most sonorous tones, I said:

"My good woman, later on, when you are arrested for conspiring to defeat the ends of justice, you may tell the court that you never informed Colonel Constable last night about that letter. I will now go to the Police Station, and send the policeman for you."

The woman, delightfully ignorant of the law, as most English people are, collapsed.

"Oh, sir, don't."

"I must warn you now that anything which you say may be used in evidence against you."

I opened the door and the bell rang. I shut it with a bang, and there was Mrs. Hornblower outside peering through the small window panes. "Good afternoon again," said I, but she tossed her head, said nothing and went down the steps into the road. I looked round and began to walk up the street, when I heard the bell behind me ring once more, and there was the terrified postmistress by my side, saying, "Oh, sir, come back. I didn't mean it. I couldn't bear it. I couldn't really."

I turned, to see the spectacles fall from her nose to the ground, and stooped to pick them up.

"I'm not a hard man," I said, "but . . ."

"Oh, sir, don't! don't!"

I saw the poor old thing was going into hysterics, so I caught hold of her, and led her back into the office. "You ought to sit down," I said, and pushed open the glass door which led into her sitting-room, and placed her in the horsehair arm-chair by the empty grate. There she sat, gasping with terror, and putting her hands to her heart.

"I am very sorry, Ma'am! I thought you did not understand how serious your conduct was—but you see I have to do my duty."

"Oh, sir, I really didn't mean any harm—how my heart does beat. The Colonel, he led me on and out it popped before I knew what I was saying."

"It was far worse than your reading all the postcards and gossiping about them."

"I don't say I never catch sight of what is on a postcard. I can't help it, you see, and if people will write on such things they must expect them to be read."

"Yes, Madam, but you see there are more serious charges against you. When did you last steam a letter open with that kettle?"

"I never did!"

"Be very careful, Ma'am! We detectives know things, but I don't want to be hard on you."

"It was only once. It was (and here she began to cry) it was to—to the Duke of Bedminster—sob—sob—I did so want to know how people wrote to Dukes. It—it—really wasn't important, it was the letter of a little girl. It—it might have been written by a common child."

"How about that telegram?" I asked sharply.

"What telegram?" she asked with surprise.

"The one Lady Dorothy Poynings sent last week."



"She didn't send one. She didn't really. It did not go from here. There was only one telegram all last week. The parlourmaid at the Hall brought it. It was to a Mr. Johnson at a London Hotel. It only said, "Meet us Paddington 9.55 Kathleen." That shows, doesn't it, sir, that it could not be from Lady Dorothy."

"How can I verify that if I don't know the hotel? You might be making it up."

"I don't remember the hotel. I really don't. You won't be hard on me, will you? I've never had anything to do with the police. Oh, it's so dreadful, and I so respected in Poynings."

"Well, Ma'am, I'm not a hard man. If I put it rightly to my superiors I don't suppose that they will insist on my going on with it. I'll do my best for you."

"O sir, you are kind. I (sniff, sniff), don't know what I should have done."

"But you must not tell Mrs. Hornblower, or anyone else who I am. Tell them, I am just Mr. Frost, staying at the 'Fisherman's Arms'."

I was sorry for the old girl, but she had tried to bluff me, and I did not like her opening manners. It may do her good after all, when she has had a cup of tea and recovered her nerve. Meantime, I think I have pumped her dry.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## MISS DAMPIER GETTING RATTLED

I HAD hardly returned to the "Fisherman's Arms," when I saw, from the coffee-room window which looked out on the garden, Miss Dampier crossing the bridge. A minute later I heard her inquiring of Robinson! "Is a Mr. Frost staying here? A gentleman who came to look over the school yesterday?"

I immediately opened the coffee-room window, and stepped out into the garden, for if I was going to have an interview with Miss Dampier, it was not right that Robinson and his wife should be within earshot.

"Miss Dampier, sir," said Robinson.

"Ah! Miss Dampier, I was hoping you would call. So after all there is a possibility of a vacancy next term."

"Possibly!" said Miss Dampier, looking at me and Robinson. She was still very prim and proper, but the strain was telling on her,

and I feared, for the girls' sakes, that you could no longer depend on her temper.

"Do sit down," I said, as Robinson retreated.

"This can't go on," said Miss Dampier with decision. "I don't know what you are doing sitting in this garden, but you are not finding Lady Dorothy."

"On the other hand, I now know a good deal about the school, about Lady Dorothy and others, and am well on my way to discover where she is. This morning I was in Linchester, and the story of why she went away is slowly forming in my mind. Hitherto I have omitted asking you who financed Lady Dorothy in starting the school."

"I don't know. At least I am not at liberty to say, and I can't see what such questions have to do with finding out where Lady Dorothy is."

"Of course, we can advertise, if you like. I can promise you the *Daily Intelligence* would come out to-morrow with headlines—*The Missing Mistress*. I have only to send a wire and a man will be here by six o'clock to interview you, and obtain photographs. He will work up a first-rate sensation, and Lady Dorothy will be discovered at Harrogate or elsewhere in a couple of days."

"But the school would be ruined," said Miss Dampier.

"I suppose so," I admitted. "Also a good many facts would become public property."

"I don't know what you mean! Please explain."

"I am not ready to explain yet. I am not sure of my facts. Why did Lady Dorothy run away?"

"Don't be absurd, Inspector. Of course, she did not run away. Some horrid accident must have happened. I don't know what, I am sure—and you ought to be tracing it. You don't seem to understand what this means to me and the staff. The anxiety we feel. At present it has been kept from the girls. They don't suspect anything. But they write letters home. One mother wrote to me this morning to say that she was sorry to hear that Lady Dorothy was away, and hoped she was not ill. That was the result of a chance remark in a Sunday letter. What I shall have to answer next week I don't know."

"It is awkward," I said sympathetically.

"Awkward!" exclaimed Miss Dampier. "And then Lady Brassingham has arrived to give a note of comic opera to the whole business."

What she thinks she is doing I don't know; playing at being head mistress!"

"Yes! I knew she had arrived. She came down this morning to—to see the Robinsons, and I understand from them that she is bringing two little girls here to tea this afternoon at four o'clock."

Miss Dampier glanced at her wrist watch. "Are you going to tell me what you have discovered?"

"I have discovered that Lady Dorothy Poynings intended to go away; that she and Miss Le Fanu were met at Paddington by Mr. Johnson; and that Mr. Johnson is Miss Le Fanu's fiancé."

"And who may Mr. Johnson be?"

"He has yet to be discovered. Johnson is a common name. One thing only can I tell you. He builds his castles on the sand."

## CHAPTER XIX

## LADY BRASSINGHAM'S TEA PARTY

Miss Dampier hurried away, having learnt nothing and told nothing. She went up the village so as to avoid Lady Brassingham, and left me to watch the stream and regret that it was not quite a holiday. Presently I saw Lady Brassingham coming through the park gates, and walking in a slow, determined manner, with the ebony stick. On either side of her, but at a respectful distance, was a little girl in a white frock. Lady Brassingham looked like a queen in a procession attended by her maidens. She was really a well-disposed dragon not knowing what to do with a couple of kittens.

The three came solemnly into the "Fisher-man's Arms", and entered the coffee-room, where Robinson had prepared a tea fit for a dozen.

"How do you do, Mr. Frost," said Lady Brassingham. "So you are still here. This

is Joan, and this Angela. We are having a little tea party. Perhaps you will join us."

I never looked on two more demure children than Joan and Angela at that moment. Angela looked as if she had never set eyes on me, and never called me a "stuffy old bird"; Joan had pretty, silky, fair hair, and the most engaging dimples when she smiled. The children were very unlike in appearance, but I noticed that they kept up communication with their eyes. Lady Brassingham was not accustomed to children, and seemed at first unable to make them talk. They answered her questions very politely while they ate with a dogged determination that Robinson should make nothing out of the meal. It was a little awkward for all parties—this catechism about their parents, their homes, and their games. It was only when we came to their lessons that Joan made the first unsolicited remark, and, after that, conversation never flagged:

"We like Lady Dorothy to take us. 'She makes lessons so interesting.'"

"I wonder if she can keep you in order," said Lady Brassingham.

"Rather!" said Angela.

"Nobody ever does anything wrong if Lady Dorothy is looking," said Joan.

"A little bird told me that she spoilt you," said Lady Brassingham to Angela.

"No!" said Angela. "It is Joan who is her blue-eyed pet."

"Don't be silly," said Joan.

"But you are."

"I'm not."

"And where are you going for your holidays?" I asked Joan, in order to stop a quarrel.

"To Scotland. We always go at the end of July, because mother says she likes to settle in before the house-party arrives for the Twelfth."

"And Angela?"

"I hope we shall stay at home this year. It's much better fun than being in some stuffy little house at the seaside with a governess."

"Where did you go last year?" I asked.

"To Woolacombe. It wasn't so bad, because we went there in September after chicken-pox, when we ought to have been coming back to school."

"That's where you met Miss Le Fanu," said Joan.

"That's a secret," said Angela, with a furious glance.



"Why?" asked Lady Brassingham.

"Because, Lady Brassingham, Miss Le Fanu had her fiancé with her, and Angela thought she might not want anyone to know."

"I'll never tell you anything again," said Angela.

"Don't you see," said Lady Brassingham, "it was very nice of Angela not to gossip about Miss Le Fanu."

Angela looked mollified—a picture of satisfied virtue.

"It also means," said I, "that Miss Le Fanu must be very nice for you to be so considerate."

"She is," said Angela, "but Mr. Johnson was nicer. Bobby said he was a ripper."

"What's that?" asked Lady Brassingham.

Angela did not interpret, but went on: "He had been at Linchester, just like Daddy. Bobby is going there, too. Mr. Johnson told him to tweak old Mac's nose for him with his love, and Bobby promised."

"If old Mac be Mr. Macmillan, I think the promise was a rash one," said I.

"Well, Bobby may forget. He won't go to Linchester for two years yet."

"I suppose," said I, "that Miss Le Fanu and Mr. Johnson were staying at your hotel?"

"No! we met them on the sands. Miss Le Fanu's mother lives there. We went to tea with her."

"And Mr. Johnson was living in Woolacombe too?"

"No! He's a farmer. Bobby is going to be a farmer, too, just like him."

"Don't you think," said Joan, "that Scotland is better than these vulgar seaside places?"

Lady Brassingham looked considerably surprised at this *obiter dictum*, and then she said: "Well, my dear, I prefer Ireland—" and, after a pause, she added, "but I shall never go there again."

Remembering what Billy had told me, and not wishing to see Lady Brassingham go off at the deep end, I was glad that a grey cat suddenly appeared in the room, stealthily moving under the chairs. Angela saw her, and was off her chair like a shot. The cat saw Angela and was under the sideboard like a shot. Cats are not very fond of being handled by children. Angela knelt down to draw her out, but the cat arched her back, spat defiance, and scratched Angela—not very hard—but Angela, I regret to say, said "Damn".

"Angela!" said Lady Brassingham severely.

"The nasty beast scratched me."

"But you must not use such language. What would your mother say?"

"Oh, Mummy says it sometimes—I've heard her."

"I think you must be mistaken."

"No, Lady Brassingham. Really, I remember one time quite well. Mummy came in to see me in my bath. She was dressed, and just going down to dinner. And I threw a sponge full of soapy water right at her, and Mummy said 'Damn', as plain as plain could be."

"You ought not to do such very naughty things."

"I know that you ought not to do them—not when you are in a bath. There's too much of you to slap, and Mummy had her rings on."

"You jolly well deserved all you got," said Joan.

"You wouldn't have liked it," said Angela.

"I shouldn't have done it."

"Good little girl!"

"My father," said Joan, looking straight at Lady Brassingham, "would have said, it was a damned silly thing to do."

I am glad to say that Lady Brassingham's look was more than Joan's impudence could

stand. She suddenly went scarlet. Lady Brassingham said coldly: "I think you children had better go and play in the garden. Mr. Frost and I have heard enough of your very unedifying conversation."

Two abashed little girls almost crept out of the room.

## CHAPTER XX

## LADY BRASSINGHAM'S TRIALS

"I DON'T know what the world is coming to," said Lady Brassingham. "And as for the bringing up of children——"

"The children are not being brought up. They bring themselves up, and are in continual warfare against their elders, who have neglected their duty."

"And where will it all end?"

"In a reaction which will go to the other extreme."

"Dorothy, at any rate, seems able to manage them. She can teach also. The Head Girl, Letty Boldero, has won a History Scholarship at Somerville Hall, and there is another girl who has an Exhibition for modern languages at Girton. It is the Dampier woman who does the routine work. She's a drill sergeant by nature, and she can be spiteful. She came to me at lunch time and said 'Lady Dorothy teaches

history to the Sixth to-morrow, and afterwards German to the Middle School. She knew I could not teach Letty Boldero history, and my German does not get much further than *guten tag, ja, nein, ach so, auf wiedersehen*. I had to say I could relieve some other teacher, and what did she do but bring me a pile of French exercises for correction. I nearly decreed a whole day's holiday on the spot, but I did not know what the girls would do if I did. Those two in the garden would probably murder one another."

"I was afraid your Ladyship might find being a head mistress somewhat difficult."

"I don't suppose it is any worse than managing a V.A.D. hospital, but I am a dozen years older than when I did that. That Head Girl, Letty Boldero, got hold of me after lunch. Her father is the K.C., and she has inherited his gift for cross-examination. A regular little Miss Nosey Parker that girl is. She insisted on showing me over the whole place after lunch, though I kept on telling her that it was my old home, and that I hated every alteration Lady Dorothy had made. Then she went off into all manner of superlatives about Dorothy, and her goodness in giving her private tuition, ending

with: 'Thursday is my day. I suppose Lady Dorothy will be back by then—won't she?' Then we went on a little further, the young woman chattering about herself all right. Suddenly she said: 'It's very hard on Lady Dorothy to be mewed up here with the Season in London at its height. I am sure if I had a school like this I should want to get away sometimes and have a little fling, and see a bit of life.' I said that Dorothy was over thirty, and had, I expect, no longer any desire for dancing. 'But, dear Lady Brassingham, Lady Dorothy dances divinely. She is ever so much better than Miss Waldron, who is our physical exercises and games mistress.' I said that Dorothy's one interest was in the school. 'Of course it is,' said Letty, 'but you know in the holidays she does go away. She went to the Riviera last Easter. There is a photo on the mantelpiece in her room of her and Miss Le Fanu and a gentleman—her brother, I suppose? That is Lord Castlekerry, isn't it?' I said, 'I hadn't looked!' It was a lie, but I hope it may be forgiven me. Then Miss Letty went on: 'It was splendid of you, dear Lady Brassingham, to come down here. All the girls are so excited about it. Of course Miss Dampier knew—she

did know, didn't she?—but she never told a soul—not even the staff. They were all talking about it when I went with reports into the staff room this morning. The staff, you know, but of course I ought not to say it, like it best when Miss Dampier is not acting head.'”

“I thought, Lady Brassingham, that your appearance would add to the interest of life, but I hope you will go on trying to discover why Lady Dorothy went away and how.”

“That is all very well, but it is your business to discover things.”

“I haven't discovered much, but I do happen to know that Lady Angela's 'Ripper', Mr. Johnson, met the ladies at Paddington, and that Miss Le Fanu sent him a telegram beforehand to a London hotel.”

“That does not carry us much further.”

“But now that we know from Lady Angela that Mrs. Le Fanu lives at Woolacombe our researches should be easy. Directly you go, I will telegraph to the police at Woolacombe for information.”

“Then the sooner I go the better. I wonder what has become of those children.”

We went out into the garden, but they were not there.



"They have probably gone to the kitchen garden to see how many strawberries Robinson did not pick for tea."

As we approached the little gate in the yew hedge, this is what we heard:

"Now, Squirt, I'll be Our Dolly. Listen!—Angela, darling, you won't do that any more, will you?"

"I won't. On my honour as a Brownie," came the Squirt's voice in reply. "And now kid, I am the Damper. Really, Joan, when I see you behaving like that, I wonder what sort of home you can have come from."

"Cat!"

"No! That's not playing the game. You wouldn't dare to say that."

"I would if she said anything against my home."

"Now look here—I am Lady Brassingham. The conversation of you children is most—Oh, Joan, I've forgotten the word. What was it?"

"I'm not sure, but I think it was damnable—Oh! sh!" Joan had seen us.

Lady Brassingham said that it was time to go back to school. A couple of minutes later she was crossing the bridge, and two subdued and decorous little girls walked with her—one on either side.

## CHAPTER XXI

## A REFORMED POSTMISTRESS

As soon as Lady Brassingham and her charge were out of sight, I went up to the Post Office again. I found that the spectacles of the postmistress were once more on the tip of her nose. Her lips were very tightly closed, and she was moving up and down restlessly behind the counter. What I had not, however, expected was none the less true—the postmistress was glad to see me. In fact she had hoped that I would call again.

“That Miss Dampier has been here—and, would you believe it? She wanted me to tell her about your affairs. I told her I was ashamed of her trying to tempt a poor but respectable old woman who knows her duty and what she oughtn’t to do—I told her what I thought of her—and she a lady, too. She didn’t half like it.”

“What did Miss Dampier want to know?”

"She! She wanted to know about you—the impudence of it—as if I should tell the likes of her anything. She wanted to know who you had been writing to, and what telegrams you had sent."

"Most improper," said I. "It seems to me that I shall have to visit Miss Dampier, and threaten her with the utmost penalties of the Law. How can she expect that the government of the country can go on, or Scotland Yard fulfil its responsible duties, if they are subjected to the espionage of pragmatical personalities."

The postmistress looked at me over her spectacles with bewildered admiration, as well she might. From thinking that I was a policeman on her own level, she was beginning to believe that I was a mysterious official on whom the destinies of the Empire depended.

While she was in this frame of mind I wrote out a wire to the police at Woolacombe asking for immediate information about Mrs. and Miss Le Fanu. The postmistress received it as if it were the draft of a secret treaty between two European powers. That she should handle it gave her a sense of importance, and lifted her into a sphere to which no Mrs. Hornblower could ever hope to soar.

I then sent another wire to Billy that he should search Kelly's many directories for the Southern half of England for farmers named Johnson, and see if any of them had the Christian name of Patrick. Also that he should inquire at Lambeth if any special licences had been issued during the last week. This second telegram was sent in code—a fact that impressed the postmistress more than anything else. She had never before been asked to send so long a wire full of such inexplicable nonsense.

Having done my business, I returned to the inn. The sun was declining, and I saw a big fish—my friend of last night—rising near the bridge. I could not resist the temptation, but hunted up Robinson, borrowed his rod and tackle and consulted him about the right fly. Standing against the low wall of the garden I made a few preliminary casts and then I tempted that fish. Twice, three times, I tempted him, and then my fly fell just where it should in a little eddy caused by the bridge. The fish rose to that fly all right, and by an instinctive movement of my wrist I had him hooked. There was something of a struggle before I landed him, and I was sorry afterwards to see that in my excitement I had

trodden down several beautiful campanulas that had been planted beneath the wall.

It was a triumph, and Robinson congratulated me. I went upstairs with some self-satisfaction, but when I reached my room I remembered that the Patrick Johnson whom I had in mind, and perhaps Miss Le Fanu, were Roman Catholics, and might not think of applying to Lambeth for a special licence.

## CHAPTER XXII

## THE WELMANS

COLONEL CONSTABLE, I was told, had gone up to London for a couple of days. He was probably at the Senior giving someone his views on the higher education of women and the awful result it was having in aristocratic circles. I could imagine his almost whispering how he could tell if he liked of a Peer's daughter who had come down to being a schoolmistress, and vanished into the blue. "A dreadful scandal, my dear fellow—I am not at liberty to mention names, but—you mark my words—the papers will be full of it in a few days' time."

To imagine all that it was not necessary to go to the Senior, and I preferred Major Pickering's company at the "Fisherman's Arms". I liked him, and was glad that we should have the coffee-room all to ourselves.

From my bedroom window I had seen the Major come in looking hot, dusty and tired. He came down to dinner, after a bath and a change, looking alert, fresh and clean. But I was not surprised at his expostulation. "Look here, my dear fellow, I like your talk about just the next village—the beastly place must be at least four miles away, and I have walked both ways this sweltering afternoon." Men, like the Major, will play three rounds of golf during the day, just, as they say, to keep fit, but will regard a six miles walk along a road as something almost beyond the limits of their endurance.

He was propitiated by my sympathy, and enjoyed his share of the trout, and the rest of an excellent dinner. Before its conclusion we had decided on another bottle of the port. It was not until the waiter had retired and Robinson had been assured that we should want nothing else, that anything was said of Pickering's mission to Parton.

"I don't quite know what you wanted me to discover, or what bearing it could have on the disappearance of Lady Dorothy Poynings, but you were all wrong about my getting anything out of the publican. First

of all, the pub at Parton is not a very classy place, and secondly, I did not find any round-bellied Boniface inside. There was only a young woman, and I have no doubt she would have liked to talk to me, but she was not the sort I care to talk to. So I went and looked at the church, and read all the epitaphs of Harry Greswell's ancestors. My! he has something to live up to if he would be worthy of his race, and then I fell in with the Vicar."

"Better company for you, sir, than a barmaid."

"Oh, he was no end of a good fellow. Not a bit like a parson."

This is a remark I have often heard, and it causes me to wonder. Why is it that the clergy are individually liked and as a class despised or detested? This particular parson had proved himself "no end of a good fellow" by taking the weary Major home to tea.

"You see," he went on, "he tumbled to my tie. He was himself an old Linchester boy—of course long before my time, but it made us pals at once. So I asked him about Greswell, and found out that he had to sell the property—beastly hard luck, too—after the War, but had kept the Dower House for



himself, and came to Parton from time to time. About the Welmans you want to hear about, he was a bit reticent. I suppose a Padre does not consider it good form to discuss his parishioners."

"So you had a wasted journey?"

"Not altogether. You see, I went into the vicarage for tea, and there was a wife there—jolly nice woman, too—most amusing. She talked about the Welmans all right. Her husband interrupted her now and again by saying: 'My dear, you ought not to say that'; but it didn't make any odds. I imagine that when Mrs. Benton really gets going her husband can't hold her in."

"What did you hear?"

"Pa Welman, that's what Mrs. Benton called him, died in a remote past. Mrs. Benton did not know him, but everyone said that he started life as a pawnbroker, and ended it as a money-lender with six addresses and having six names of which Welman was not one. Anyhow he made a colossal fortune, and his wife always refers to him as a leading financier in the City. When Ma Welman buried him, she also buried her past. She went to the Riviera, Biarritz and Deauville and scraped together

a good many acquaintances among smart people. Then she bought Parton and settled down here to be a great Lady and get into County Society. The County, I gather, are not very cordial—awful stick-in-the-muds—County people. Ma Welman gets asked to the big garden parties, and charity functions, but she does not get much further. She isn't helped by her son."

"Ah! yes. It's the son I want to hear about."

"Well, you saw him last night—a pretty average rotter! It's only his mother who believes that he is 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form'. Where does that tag come from? No matter! He was, of course, a one and only. When he was a kid his mother wouldn't have him crossed in any way, and his father was always telling him that he had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth—I suppose one of the spoons pledged at the pawnshop. He was sent to Harrow, but left pretty soon because the boys were not kind to him. Then he had private tutors and travelled with his mother to Monte Carlo and Deauville—that didn't do him much good. He was at Cambridge for a few terms, and then the Dons

turned nasty and sent him down. Mrs. Benton says he spends much of his time in London at dubious night clubs, and brings the most appalling people to Parton for week-ends."

"How does the good lady know all this?"

"Well, I don't suppose she could substantiate it all in a Court of Law. But there can't be many people to talk about in Parton, and if you talk enough, in time you have a pretty coherent story."

"So you heard nothing which would connect the Welmans with Poynings Hall."

"Yes! I heard that the school was Mrs. Welman's strong suit. She never missed anything there—a match—theatricals—a concert—prize-giving—she was always on the spot with the cub in attendance. You see there she met the County and Parents and gave herself the airs of a patroness. Sometimes she got badly scored off. Mrs. Benton told me how at a concert last term she got hold of a small child and said, for everyone to hear: 'So this is the dear Duchess' little girl', and a shrill little voice said: 'Do you really know Mummy?' Everyone, of course, turned away to laugh, and Mrs. Welman went scarlet. Children are so innocent."

"I would not bank on that, if I were you. I have seen the young lady. She called me a stuffy old bird, and said 'Damn' in the presence of Lady Brassingham."

"Damned Lady Brassingham, you can't mean it?"

"No, she didn't go as far as that. But never mind about her. Did the Vicar's wife say anything about Mr. Welman and Lady Dorothy Poynings?"

Major Pickering hesitated for a moment before replying.

"You will understand I don't like repeating gossip about Lady Dorothy, and the Vicar did his best to shut his wife up when she got on to that subject. He assured me there was nothing in it."

"But it is that gossip which I particularly want to know. I don't suppose there is anything in it, but people do sometimes go away to escape from being talked about, and I knew the young man was constantly going to the school with notes from his mother."

"Well, if you must know, it is just this: Everyone says that Mrs. Welman wants her son to marry Lady Dorothy, so as to establish her own position in the county, and some

people have the infernal impudence to say that he proposed to her—but I can't believe that even he had the cheek to do that. Mrs. Benton pretended to know that she had refused him. That's all—and I expect it's a lie. You know it put me off a bit when she said it. The Vicar saw that something was wrong and got me away into his study for a pipe, and we had a good long clack about Linchester. He was head of Pearson's house, ten years before I was."

"Was Mr. Pearson really a good house master?"

"Oh course he was. Pearson's was cock house when I was head of it. That was Pearson's doing, mind you, not mine. It went down a bit afterwards, but it's regained its position all right."

"I should have thought Mr. Pearson might be too amiable to be an effective schoolmaster."

"You are quite wrong. Pearson was so accessible that there were always boys in his room. He talked so easily and listened so kindly that there was never anything in his house which he didn't know. Somebody or other, without meaning to do so, was sure to give the show away. Then we all knew that

he was interested in us, and was really concerned if some untidy little fag was down on his luck. Then he always knew his own mind. He was ever so nice, but you couldn't make him budge. Everyone, almost, liked him, except Castlekerry. Castlekerry got it into his head that Pearson was trying to influence him, and Castlekerry was the sort of chap who resented that sort of thing. Awfully good fellow—Castlekerry—but quite impossible to manage.”

“He must have had a bad time when Mr. Macmillan succeeded.”

“It wasn't altogether easy for any of us the first few terms, and I am bound to say that Castlekerry and Macmillan did not hit it off. You see Macmillan thought him a slacker, and when Macmillan has made up his mind that a boy is a slacker, he's done with him. Castlekerry, who was a born rebel if anyone was, thought Macmillan a tyrant, and called him a brute all over the house. I was very fond of Castlekerry, we had been pals for a long time, but as a Prefect and Head of the House he made my last two terms very difficult. He was always agin the government.”

“Well, Mr. Macmillan didn't strike me as a particularly sympathetic personality.”

"You know, I think you are wrong about him. He has tremendous driving force, and is most frightfully keen on his job. Of course he is a holy terror to small boys—but as boys get up in the school they get to respect him. I don't know him like I know Pearson, with whom I was five years, but when I go back now and find the house was never better than it is to-day I have to give Macmillan full marks. I say, you ought not to get me yapping about my old school. Lots of fellows think I am rather dotty on the subject, and it can't interest you."

"Anything about Lord Castlekerry interests me at the moment. I have to find Lady Dorothy Poynings, and to do so I want to learn all I can of Miss Dampier, Mr. Welman, Miss Le Fanu and Lord Castlekerry."

"I don't understand your proceedings, but I am tired after that long, dusty walk, and am going to bed. Is there any chance of your finding Lady Dorothy to-morrow?"

"There is! but I can't promise."

## CHAPTER XXIII

## CLUES AT LAST

NEXT morning, while I was still in bed, a wire was brought me from the Devon police. I was told that the postmistress had delivered it with her own hand—a duty she had never hitherto been known to perform. The wire, however, was not satisfactory, it said:

“Mrs. Le Fanu died February. Sale March. Miss Le Fanu left neighbourhood. Address unknown.”

This somewhat dashed my hopes, though it was consistent with the conclusion at which I had arrived—that Mr. Johnson was Lord Castlekerry.

Lord Castlekerry had disappeared, and if anyone knew of his present whereabouts it would be his only sister. Lord Castlekerry had been at Linchester in Mr. Pearson's house,



and so had Mr. Johnson. Lord Castlekerry had been nicknamed at school "Farmer George" and Mr. Johnson was a farmer. Mr. Johnson had red hair, and, though I had forgotten to ask the Major on this point, I remembered that Lady Dorothy's hair was red. Mr. Johnson was engaged to Miss Le Fanu, and Lady Dorothy gave her a home on the death of her mother. Lady Dorothy, for some reason, had planned to disappear, and Miss Le Fanu had wired to Mr. Johnson—"meet us". To whom should Lady Dorothy go if she were in trouble but to her brother? It was most unlikely that she would throw herself on the protection of her secretary's fiancé. I still had to discover why Lady Dorothy had gone away, and where Mr. Johnson farmed.

I went over these facts in my mind while I was dressing, and directly I reached the coffee-room Robinson approached me, saying: "Your man has returned." This was rather a surprise to me and I asked: "Has he brought the car back?"

"No, sir! He told me that his instructions were to leave the car in Town. He has come on a motor bicycle, he says with important letters."

"Can a man never have a quiet holiday?" said I. "Well, I am going first of all to eat my breakfast. Tell him to come in here in a quarter of an hour. See that he has something to eat himself."

"We took that for granted, sir; and I may say that he has done justice to his meal."

What I really wanted was a few minutes to complete the notes I have given above on Lord Castlekerry, and on a few other points connected with the problem. When once started on a case I like to complete my investigations, but the Yard is limited in its interests, and would, I knew, be satisfied when I could show reason for believing that there was no criminal explanation for the disappearance of Lady Dorothy Poynings. After all, I am human, and not infallible. I could, in consequence, urge the necessity of proof. I did not want to give up the case until Lady Dorothy was found. I did not want Lady Brassingham, Miss Dampier or Major Pickering to say that anyone could successfully hide from a Detective-Inspector of the C.I.D.

• In a quarter of an hour Billy appeared, and I congratulated him on looking so fit after what must have been an early start.

"I tell you what it is, sir. My medical adviser will soon be insisting on a rest cure. Yesterday morning and to-day I have had to rise with the early worm, and I sat up for hours last night with *Kelly's Directories*—and these literary researches are almost beyond my mental powers."

"Research is so profitable, and the early morning is so invigorating. Tell me why you have come."

"I reported to the Chief on what we had done, and he does not think the case now presents any difficulties. If you cannot conclude it to-day, it is to be left to your humble servant. He wants you for that mysterious arson case in Yorkshire. The Insurance Company are convinced it is arson. Roberts is engaged on the preliminary inquiries, but our Chief wants you to take on from to-morrow."

"What a life, Billy! Still I have a day and most of the day is before me. I should be sorry if it were left for you to discover that there is a Bolshie plot connected with a Baby Austin and the infant daughter of a Duke. Why! it would cause the resignation of Mr. Henderson."

"At any rate it would be exciting, and I will tell you what it is, sir—there is jolly little that's exciting to be found in *Kelly's Directories*."

"None the less, they are very useful books. Indispensable, I might say. And the question is, what have you found in them?"

"I have only worked through ten Western and Southern Counties, but there are hundreds of Johnsons. Here is a list of thirty-five farmers. You will see that two of them are Patrick, and the others are only P. That may stand for Patrick, Philip or Percy, or even for Pythagoras for all I know."

"What do you know about Pythagoras?" asked Major Pickering, who had entered the room unobserved by Billy.

"Nothing, sir," said Billy, "except that he keeps a vegetable eating house near the British Museum."

Pickering laughed and went out. Billy scowled as he closed the door. "There's the master of the Baby Austin shadowing us again."

"Billy," said I, "you really must cultivate what is essential to a detective—eyes in the back of your head. You ought to have known

someone had come in. The glass of that picture in front of you sufficiently reflects any opening of the door. Now, let us look at your list. I think we will begin with the Patricks—one is near Truro at St. something-or-other—how badly you write! The other is at Aylmer Valence in the Cotswolds. Telephone to the police at Truro to know about Patrick Johnson, his age, if married, and how long he has been there. Then try Aylmer Valence. I hope Aylmer Valence will be the place, for we could drive there in a couple of hours, and I really want to finish this case myself.”

“Always jealous of your subordinate getting a little credit,” said Billy, as he went out.

“Stop a minute,” said I, “you might also call up the Yard to send a man round the Roman Churches in the West End, and find out if anyone named Le Fanu was married in them on Saturday, Sunday or Monday.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

## A LAWYER'S LETTER

I HAD just settled down to read what the *Daily Intelligence* had to tell about the great fire at Waverdale Hall, in Yorkshire, when Robinson came into the room to say that Lady Brasingham was at the door in her car. This was rather unexpected at half past nine in the morning, but school hours are early, and Lady Brasingham was a person of incalculable action.

I went out to find her Ladyship in her great Daimler. She hardly condescended to say "Good-morning". She commanded: "Get your hat and come with me to Appleton. I've discovered something." I did as I was bid, and a few minutes later I was seated by her side on the way to the market town.

• "Read that," said Lady Brasingham, putting a letter into my hands. "I found it this morning in a table drawer, when I was looking

for a blue pencil to correct those French exercises. I meant to do them properly because that Dampier woman thought I didn't know how."

The letter was on paper headed: Dampier and Wilson: Solicitors and Commissioners of Oaths, the Market Place, Appleton. It ran as follows:

"Our client regrets that she is unable to consider any of the proposals made in your letter of the 30th ultimo. She hopes that you will regard as final the decision which we forwarded you on March 24th. She then expressed her intention of calling in the Mortgage on Poynings Hall, and she must insist on being paid at the same time the large arrears of interest that are due."

Having read it, Lady Brassingham said, "now look what is written on the back". I turned it over and found a pencil note: "Mrs. Welman's revenge for Tony Lumpkin's disappointment."

"What do you make of it?" I asked.

"Dorothy intended that letter to be found with her comment on it, when England should

be ringing with the mystery of her disappearance."

"It seems spiteful," I said.

"The spite apparently has not been all on one side," said Lady Brassingham grimly. "You will note also that the lawyers are Wilson and Dampier. I always thought the Dampier woman knew more than she told."

"What is your Ladyship going to do, and where do I come in? Scotland Yard cannot mix itself up in personal disputes of this nature. As a man I can sympathise, but in my official capacity I can do nothing."

"Your business begins and ends with the finding of Dorothy. That is all right. After finding that letter, it is quite natural that you should apply to Messrs. Wilson and Dampier for an explanation. The rest you can leave to me. Brassingham, good man, always said if you have to do business with sharks have a witness."

"Your Ladyship ought not to prejudge the case. For all we know Messrs. Wilson and Dampier are a highly respectable firm——"

• "Rubbish!" said Lady Brassingham. "Here we are! Now you send in your name. I follow as the distressed and anxious relative."



## CHAPTER XXV

## LADY BRASSINGHAM AND THE LAWYER

WE entered into a long passage, stone flagged. A glass door on the right showed an office with several clerks at work; on the left was another door with "Enquiries" painted on it. I opened this door, and found a young man writing at a table that had piles of folded documents tied with red tape.

"We wish to see Mr. Wilson or Mr. Dampier," said I, offering my card.

The young man read it with some surprise. He looked at me and Lady Brassingham; he looked also at the big Daimler outside. He said: "Certainly, sir. I will see if Mr. Wilson can see you. Will you take a chair," and vanished.

I did not take a chair, but I offered one to Lady Brassingham, who remarked, "too dusty", and then she pointed to a large tin box with her stick. On it was painted "The Exors. of George Welman."

"Mr. Wilson will see you, sir," said the clerk, looking dubiously at Lady Brassingham.

"I am coming also," said that lady, and we were shown up an exceedingly dirty staircase, and ushered into an exceedingly comfortable room, and surprised Mr. Wilson retreating from the window, from whence, no doubt, he had been looking at the Daimler. Mr. Wilson was in the early thirties. He was very tall, very thin, very fair, and wore a somewhat long moustache. He also had a large pair of tortoiseshell spectacles, which seemed to diminish his little features and made him look all eyes.

He greeted us somewhat nervously, and offered us chairs, and then retreated behind his writing table and asked:

"You are Detective-Inspector Frost, of the Criminal Investigation Department? Our firm has nothing to do with the criminal side of the law, but if you want legal assistance I can recommend you to a very experienced solicitor."

"Thank you," I replied, "but we have come here to make some inquiries about Lady Dorothy Poynings. This lady is a relative of hers."

• Mr. Wilson turned towards Lady Brassingham, who, leaning on the top of her stick, regarded

him with such malevolence that he was evidently disconcerted.

"I am afraid I don't understand," he began.

"You are aware that Lady Dorothy has disappeared?"

He evidently was not aware of it. Her disappearance as evidently suggested complications to his mind. "I think," he said, "if you will allow me, I will fetch Mr. Dampier. You said, I think, that Lady Dorothy Poynings had disappeared."

With that he left the room. Lady Brassingham remarked as the door closed, "What a silly fool that Dampier woman must be, she hasn't told them."

Two minutes later Mr. Wilson returned with his partner, a substantial, middle-aged man, with bushy, dark eyebrows and a penetrating glance.

"Detective-Inspector Frost, and——" He looked at my companion.

"Lady Brassingham," she replied, holding the stick as if it were an offensive weapon.

"Very good," he proceeded. "Pray be seated. Now what is this that Mr. Wilson tells me—Lady Dorothy Poynings has done what?—disappeared?"

"That is so. Lady Dorothy went up to London last Saturday. Her car met her, according to orders, by the afternoon train at Appleton Junction, but she did not return, and has not been heard of since."

"Really! Very mysterious!" said Mr. Dampier with great deliberation, putting the tips of his fat, white fingers together. "Very mysterious, isn't it, Wilson?" and Mr. Wilson, tugging at his moustache, said, "Very," in a frightened voice, for Lady Brassingham was glaring at him so unpleasantly.

"May I ask," said Mr. Dampier after a pause, "what made you call here?"

"Certainly," I said. "I am, as you may suppose, investigating the case on behalf of Scotland Yard. This letter from your firm has been found in Lady Dorothy's room, and you will note her comment upon it."

Mr. Dampier took the letter, turned it over, glanced at the pencilled sentence, and handed it back to me without a word.

"Can you, I went on, give any explanation which would make the lady's conduct intelligible?"

"Lady Dorothy Poynings owes my client a very large sum of money, and if she has

absconded, my client will be very grateful to you for finding her."

"But you can give me no explanation which will help me."

"I am afraid I cannot."

"Thank you," said I, rising. "Lady Brassingham here was anxious to avoid any scandal, but if I am unable to find Lady Dorothy to-day, there's nothing for it. To-morrow's papers will advertise her disappearance and will print your letter and her comment on it. Good morning."

Lady Brassingham did not get up as she should have done, but Mr. Dampier was, luckily, only concerned with me. He said hastily:

"One minute, Inspector. Lady Brassingham is, of course, quite right. Anything in the nature of a scandal ought, if possible, to be avoided. Please sit down again. I think her ladyship was going to propose something."

"Excuse me, sir, I want you clearly to understand that my duty is to find Lady Dorothy Poynings, and account for her disappearance. In order to do that I shall take such steps as my Department consider right."

"I quite understand," said Mr. Dampier, "but I think it will be well to hear what Lady Brassingham has to say."

"I want to know how much my niece owes, and to whom?"

"I am not sure that I am at liberty to tell you that without the consent of the interested parties."

"Nonsense," said Lady Brassingham. "Does your client want her money, or does she not?" At this she drew from her handbag a fat cheque book and a fountain pen.

"I don't see," said I, "how this will aid me to find the lady."

"Don't you?" said Lady Brassingham. "Mr. Dampier, I expect, knows that people are more easily found when all claims against them have been satisfied."

"Certainly," said Mr. Dampier. "I think that is a very sensible remark. Don't you, Wilson?" Wilson, tugging still at his moustache, said, "Very."

"How much is it?" asked Lady Brassingham, unscrewing the top of her fountain pen.

"It is a very large sum," said Mr. Dampier.

"How much," snapped Lady Brassingham.

"Roughly speaking, about £16,000."

"Is that all," said Lady Brassingham; "I thought it would be much more than that," and she opened the cheque book.

"Do I understand," said Mr. Dampier, "that your ladyship is going to pay this money?" I noticed he was getting a little uncertain about what he ought to do, and what his client might desire.

"I am going to pay what I consider right," said Lady Brassingham.

"Had not your Ladyship better refer us to your legal adviser, when no doubt a settlement agreeable to all parties can be easily arranged."

"Certainly not," said Lady Brassingham. "I don't want to run up a bill of costs."

"But, Lady Brassingham, we shall have to consult our client."

"You can do that over the telephone when I have heard your explanation and stated my terms. Now how does Lady Dorothy Poynings come to owe you this money?"

"Poynings Hall is mortgaged to our client for £10,000."

"What interest does she pay?"

"Ten per cent."

"Is my niece a fool, and your client a Shylock?"

"Neither, Lady Brassingham. The Poynings Estate was, as you know, sold on the death of the late Earl. It sold very well except the house and park—big country houses were then,

and are to-day, a drug in the market. Lady Dorothy bought the property for £15,000 and mortgaged it for two-thirds of that sum. Lady Dorothy had, we understand, very slender resources, and she was starting a school—a speculative venture which could not immediately pay. Moreover, a provision was made that interest should be allowed to accumulate for five years. The interest did accumulate and Lady Dorothy now owes my client some £16,000. You will see, I think, that the rate of interest was not, considering the circumstances, excessive.”

“And has my niece been paying you £1,600 a year for the last five years?”

“Yes!”

“And the school is full and has a high reputation. It seems to me that your client has a gold mine.”

“Our client has a perfect right to call in her money.”

“But surely,” said I, “Lady Dorothy could pay you off by creating another mortgage, which she could now get on much more reasonable terms.”

“I daresay some person could be found to advance £10,000 on a mortgage at six per cent., but £16,000—— What do you think of that, Wilson?”



"We know the lady has tried. It is quite impossible," said Mr. Wilson.

"I see," said Lady Brassingham. "Unless I pay, my niece will be made a bankrupt, while your client won't get a penny of that £6,000, and will probably find a ruined school very much of a white elephant."

"Not necessarily," said Mr. Dampier, regarding his finger tips, as if they provided inspiration. "It is possible that Lady Dorothy might continue to manage the school for my client at a salary."

Lady Brassingham snorted.

"Besides," said Mr. Wilson, in his nervous, worried way, "We happen to have a firm offer from a lady already connected with the school that, should Lady Dorothy retire, she would carry it on and pay a very substantial rent."

"That is neither here nor there," said Mr. Dampier, with a furious glance at Wilson.

"It comes to this," said Lady Brassingham; "everyone wants to avoid a scandal and publicity, except perhaps Scotland Yard. So I will give you a cheque and try my plan for finding my niece."

"I have no objection," said I, "to deferring publicity for a few days."

"Very well then," said Lady Brassingham. "I will make out a cheque for £10,000, and you will hand over the title deeds."

"But the accumulated arrears," said Mr. Dampier?

"I am not going to pay them," said Lady Brassingham, "and you have no chance of recovering them. Lady Dorothy has paid £8,000, so if we take the ten years into account, your client will have had eight per cent. on her money. She won't have done so badly."

"I am afraid the law would take a different view of my client's claims, and I am quite sure she would never consent."

"You go and ask her over the telephone. I want to find my niece, and your client, I imagine, does not wish to be involved in an unpleasant scandal."

"Scotland Yard," said I, "will certainly find Lady Dorothy by one means or another in the course of a few days—that is, *if she is alive.*"

Mr. Dampier glanced at me, rose hurriedly and said: "I will consult my client," Lady Brassingham ostentatiously wrote out a cheque for £10,000.

He was at least ten minutes away. Lady Brassingham picked up her stick and rested both hands on the crook. Mr. Wilson grew

more and more nervous, and I was puzzling out how far this businesslike woman was involving me in a conspiracy.

Mr. Dampier came back looking very worried. He said, "My client consents to accept your offer."

Lady Brassingham tore out the cheque and handed it to him.

"Unfortunately—of course it is a pure formality—I must ask you to establish your identity."

"I can do that," said I, and also my own. I opened my coat and showed him my warrant card.

Mr. Dampier sat down and wrote a receipt, and sent Mr. Wilson to fetch the deeds.

"It is fine June weather," said Lady Brassingham.

Mr. Dampier grunted.

"I shall be seeing your sister this afternoon. Can I give her any message?"

"Thank you, no," said Mr. Dampier.

"Ah! Here are the papers! I don't suppose, Mr. Dampier, you often do business on this scale so quickly. Good-bye."

## CHAPTER XXVI

## LADY BRASSINGHAM'S ELATION

"BRASSINGHAM always said that I had a head for business," said Lady Brassingham complacently when we were once more within the Daimler. "Of course he taught me. He said that he had not made his fortune out of beer—though it was good beer, and he drank it himself—but because of his business aptitude. He always told me, if you really mean business, take your cheque book with you. Very few people can resist ready money."

"I am rather afraid I gave you more assistance than a man in my position ought to have done."

"You! I don't know about assistance, but I thought more than once you were going to let me down."

"I rather fancy, your Ladyship, that it was my threat of publicity which brought Mr.

Dampier to his bearings, and it was my insinuation that Lady Dorothy might have committed suicide which ensured the bargain."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Lady Brassingham. "What a fool that Dampier woman must be. Fancy her not having told her brother. I am going back to Poynings to make her squeal—that little fool Wilson let the cat out of the bag."

"To defeat your enemies is justifiable," I said, "but it is not necessary to trample on a fallen foe."

Lady Brassingham thought for a minute or two, and said, "You are right, Inspector, I won't do it. Of course it's wrong, and yet it would have given me great pleasure."

"I expect she always hoped that Lady Dorothy would marry Mr. Welman, and that she would succeed to the school and the connection."

"I don't know Mr. Welman, but I am quite sure Dorothy would never marry any Tony Lumpkin. Got too much sense for that."

"She doesn't seem to have had much sense in money matters, and I still don't see where all her money went."

"I don't think Miss Dampier showed you all the glories. You've got to remember that

getting into Poynings cost the girl all she had. For the first two years she must have lived from hand to mouth, and chiefly on an overdraft which had to be paid off. Then when she began to rake in the money, instead of using it to reduce her debt, she spent it. It must have cost some thousands to turn the stables into a gymnasium and theatre. Then she built two rooms which Letty Boldero calls labs. Letty says they are splendidly equipped. When I was a girl a schoolroom was equipped with one blackboard and a piece of chalk. Then she must needs asphalt our dear old lake, and turn it into a bathing pool; and you have seen all that levelled turf for cricket and hockey. It all cost money. No matter, things might have been worse, and I rather think that I am now mistress of Poynings, and if Dorothy wants to go on with the school I shall have to be consulted."

"There is Major Pickering at the 'Fisherman's Arms'," said I.

"So there is, and he would not be a bad match either. He is the heir to a big property since his elder brother was killed in the war. But it is no good talking of Pickering or anything else until you've found Dorothy. It

seems I've done my part, but I don't hear that you are getting on."

"I don't know if your Ladyship's duties as a temporary head mistress would allow you to be free this afternoon."

"I am thinking of resigning. When I gave one of those Mackintosh girls a conduct mark this morning I felt I had enjoyed all the sweets of office. Caught the little minx talking at prayers. So I called her up and gave her a conduct mark. Letty Bolders had told me of a conduct mark. I don't know what it means, but the girl looked sulky enough all breakfast time, so I suppose it is an unpleasant possession. If that whisky plutocrat expects his girls to have an expensive education at reduced terms, it is only right that they should behave themselves. What did you want me to do this afternoon?"

"I can't promise anything, but by two o'clock I may be able to tell you that Lady Dorothy is at Aylmer Valence. If so, you may wish to go there, and should go in the car. I will get out here and walk to the inn."

## CHAPTER XXVII

## DISCOVERIES

It may surprise people to know that I have a sensitive conscience, though perhaps it works intermittently. I never gave a thought to bouncing the postmistress, and I was not going to be done down by Mr. Dampier, but I was not quite easy in thinking that he had signed that receipt under a misapprehension. I could not defend the spite of Mrs. Welman, or the businesslike methods of Lady Brassingham, although I had certainly contributed to her success. I imagined that £6,000 was not a matter of great importance to either Mrs. Welman or Lady Brassingham, who had, I understood, paid death duties on four millions; but she had enjoyed her triumph over Mr. Dampier as much as a wealthy man who pockets 100s. after two hours at Bridge. On the whole I wished that I had not been rushed to take a hand in the game, for £6,000 means such a lot of money



to a man with my salary and small savings. Perhaps I am wrong, but then I have always thought that Portia pressed her advantage over Shylock unduly. Women are like that.

I had not long been in my room at the "Fisher-man's Arms", when the door opened and Billy came in.

"All is discovered, and the fair lady is found, but I am not sure that that telephone box at the Post Office is sound proof, and the post-mistress has such an intelligent interest in her job."

"Did not you mention that you were my servant? She has a great respect for me."

"Love at first sight, I presume, sir. But love increases interest, and she certainly fluttered round that box more than was necessary."

"And what have you learnt?"

"That Lord Castlekerry was married to Miss Le Fanu at Farm Street on Saturday morning at 11 o'clock, and that Mr. Johnson, his wife and sister are in residence at the Edge Farm, Aylmer Valence."

"Not bad results for your morning's work."

"Jolly dull I can tell you, waiting in that Post Office for the answers to come through; and what do you think those fools at Truro did?"

Instead of answering my questions they put me through to Mr. Patrick Johnson. A woman was at the other end. I didn't know that when I said that Scotland Yard was endeavouring to trace a Mr. Johnson who had married privately on Saturday. I don't know if I was heard distinctly, but I heard a shriek. A minute afterwards someone with a rough voice was using the most awful language. I could not follow it all, because there was someone pretty strident who was evidently talking in the same room. I just rang off."

"Very prudent of you."

"The Gloucestershire man was more sensible. Chatty sort of chap, I should say. He was evidently awfully bucked by Scotland Yard taking any interest in his village. He was mad keen to know what Mr. Johnson had been doing. I told him: Nothing, the Yard only wanted to trace him as they might require his evidence about a street accident in London last Saturday. I couldn't help laughing when I heard him say, 'Is that all?'"

"You had some thrills, it seems to me."

"Three minutes thrills, and three hours of boredom. That old woman never took her eyes off me, but nothing I could do would make

her talk. I don't know how many chun the man at the Yard visited. Farm St would have come early on my list. Anyh now we know where we are, and I want to getting back to London. How are you com sir?"

"Not as your pillion rider. You can re success to the Chief, and say that I will re to-morrow at eight, ready to take up that a

----- To take as if it might mean interme-

## CHAPTER XXVIII

## A LETTER TO MISS DAMPIER

HAVING eaten a solitary lunch in the coffee-room, I sat down and wrote the following letter to Miss Dampier:

“You will be glad to hear that the problem you brought to Scotland Yard on Monday morning has been solved, and happily solved, without the publicity which I once thought was inevitable. I have just heard from one of my subordinates that Lady Dorothy Poynings is staying in the Cotswolds, and will no doubt return to Poynings Hall to-morrow or the next day. I am sure this news will be a great relief to your mind, and I think if you were to whisper to the Head Girl that the Lady Dorothy had been away to attend the wedding of her only brother, the news would spread naturally, and any suspicions that have been aroused by her

absence would be dissipated. In the pursuit of my inquiries I had the pleasure of meeting your brother this morning, and can assure you that there is no longer any cause for alarm about the financial stability of the school. This also, I feel, you will hear with satisfaction."

That's that, I said to myself. Now, I wonder how she will take it. On the whole I imagine with great relief, even though it spells the end of her ambitions. Well, one never knows. There is Major Pickering—a dark horse evidently in for the Dorothy stakes, and there is Lady Brassingham, with money to burn, who thinks that the joy of being a head mistress can be exhausted in a couple of days. It is possible that in a few months' time Miss Dampier may be opening a school elsewhere, not quite so exclusive, nor so extravagantly conducted. It is possible that a great Ducal family may be much concerned in finding a suitable disciplinary establishment for The Squirt.

## CHAPTER XXIX

## TELLING THE NEWS

"How-DO-YOU-DO! You are Major Pickering, aren't you? What a surprise to find you in an out-of-the-way place like this."

"The surprise is mutual, Lady Brassingham. I came here to fish, and you?"

"Oh, I was born here—and you know my niece, Dorothy, plays at keeping a school in the old hall."

"I had the pleasure of meeting Lady Dorothy at Monte Carlo, just after Easter."

"Indeed! I hope she was not gambling."

"Of course not—an occasional five franc piece on the number thirteen—I don't think she ever won."

"All the Poynings are unlucky. How long are you staying?"

"Do you know when Lady Dorothy returns?"

"No! Here is the man who can probably tell you that."

I had just come out of the door, behind which I had been listening, to find Lady Brassingham talking to Major Pickering, and both of them gave me an understanding nod.

"I have learnt since I last saw you that Mr. Johnson was married on Saturday last at Farm Street, and that Lady Dorothy is now at Aylmer Valence."

"Married!" said both at once.

"Mr. Johnson is married to Miss Le Fanu."

"And who is Mr. Johnson?" asked Lady Brassingham.

"That is the name by which the present Earl of Castlekerry chooses to be known."

"We live in a world of surprises," said Lady Brassingham.

"But they are not as bad as they might have been," said the Major.

"I shall go at once to Aylmer Valence—and yes! I shall bring that girl back. There must be no mysteries or scandals in the future."

"The address is: 'The Edge Farm,' Aylmer Valence, in the Cotswolds, not far from Cirencester," said I. I hope your Ladyship will have a pleasant journey."

"But you are coming also," said Lady Brassingham.

"I am sorry, your Ladyship, but I must be in London to-night. I have received orders to take up a very important case to-morrow."

"Nonsense," said Lady Brassingham, "I want you to go with me—I will send you on to Gloucester this evening, and you can easily get to London. Just pack your bag. I shall return in the Daimler in half an hour."

The good lady turned and walked resolutely up the road, without waiting for my reply. Her stick, not needed for support, gave her progress an appearance of dignity. The Major watched her until she had disappeared through the park gates, and then said:

"I should very much like to see Castlekerry again."



## CHAPTER XXX

## LADY BRASSINGHAM SOLILOQUISES

"We can now go to Aylmer Valence," said Lady Brassingham, to the chauffeur, as I seated myself in the car. "Do you know the way?"

"Yes, my lady, the chauffeur at the Hall told me. He has been there several times."

The door closed and I felt ashamed of myself.

"To think," said I, "that I have been a detective thirty years, and it never occurred to me to question that chauffeur."

"We can't think of everything," said Lady Brassingham. "For my part I can't understand how you made the discovery."

"Putting two and two together. I have finished with the case, but I am bound to say I should like to know what Lord Castlekerry did after leaving Linchester, before he became Mr. Johnson. Also how he met with Miss Le Fanu."

"Why?" asked Lady Brassingham.

"Idle curiosity," I replied. "I am made like that. Directly I am interested in a case I want to have complete information."

The car proceeded. Lady Brassingham looked out of the window and was a long time silent. I once looked through the window at the back and saw a Baby Austin not so very far behind. "Dear me!" I thought, "what would Billy say?"

Presently Lady Brassingham began, speaking very quietly as if to herself:

"I am getting old and am very lonely."

"I cannot imagine your Ladyship as ever getting old."

"You know," Lady Brassingham went on, paying no heed to me, "I promised Molly, when she was dying, that I would look after the children. I have always wanted to do so, and they wouldn't let me. I would have done everything for them."

"The young," I said, "if they are any good, like to do things for themselves."

"Eh! What's that you're saying," said Lady Brassingham sharply, as if she had just woken up. "The young like to do things for themselves. They do! and precious fools they make of themselves."

"Then comes the opportunity and privilege of age," said I, "to get them out of their scrapes."

"To pay up, you mean—I don't mind doing that, but I want to be regarded as something else than a money-box."

Lady Brassingham once more relapsed into silence. We came to a long stretch of road, and once more I glanced back to see the Baby Austin still in pursuit.

"Do you know," said Lady Brassingham at length, "I am a very rich woman? Do you know I can't spend half my income? Money is mounting up; and then some day Snowden, or some other robber, will get half of it in Death Duties. It's a horrible thought."

"The poorer taxpayer hopes that he may get some alleviation in consequence."

"Well then, he's a fool. The more money the State gets, the more big buildings it puts up to house hundreds of clerks that they may interfere with our liberties. I would like to endow Molly's children now at once with half my fortune, so as to save the money from being wasted. I should tie it up, of course, so that they could not fool it away. They'll have to

inherit everything when I die. At least everything Snowden doesn't steal. They might just as well have a good part of it now. I should like to see it being of some good."

This seemed to me a very sensible aspiration, but I made no comment, because Lady Brassingham was talking to herself rather than to me, and might resent my advice.

How that Baby Austin did leap along in the wake of the smooth-running Daimler.

"I shouldn't really mind. They might do as they liked if only they would care for me."

"Probably the only reason they don't seem to care for you is the fear you might think that they were after your money."

"But I want them to have it," said Lady Brassingham. "If I didn't care for them, you don't suppose I want the Poynings family to end in being Johnsons."

So the journey went on, Lady Brassingham being sad, then cynical, and lastly irritable. She was, I know, trying to get a grip on herself, and trying to plan the interview which would probably be the crisis of her life. Presently she said: "You'll think me a sentimental old woman, Inspector—but I am really nothing of

the kind. I have always prided myself on my common sense—a gift that was not bestowed on my brother's children. Wild Irish like Molly—but then Molly was so good.”

“I have always thought,” said I sententiously, “that the life of common sense must allow a place for sentiment, and for all that is natural.”

“I daresay you are right, but I’ve always found sentiment led women to be anti-vivisection, anti-vaccination, to being general-nuisances to their friends, and to die leaving all they possess to the home for lost dogs.”

“Sentiment allied to common sense,” I began—but the aphorism I was about to deliver was cut short by the car suddenly stopping.

“This is Aylmer Valence, my Lady. I must ask someone the way to Edge Farm.”

It was just then that the Baby Austin passed us ostentatiously, as having no connection with its lordly brother.

## CHAPTER XXXI

## LADY DOROTHY POYNINGS AT LAST

WE had shot beyond the turning to Edge Farm and had to go back and turn a little to the right. During the somewhat lengthy process of turning the Daimler in a road none too wide I noted that the Baby Austin had stopped before the door of the village inn.

At last we reached a green-painted gate in a wall of old grey stones. I got out and offered Lady Brasingham my hand, which she rejected. I noted the determined curve of her closely-shut mouth. The chauffeur handed her her stick, and her gloved fingers closed on the handle. The chauffeur opened the green gates and we passed through. Lady Brasingham going in front, very stately, and not at all in a hurry.

We found ourselves in a very pretty garden, a rockery full of flowers dividing the path from a small but well-kept lawn. There was a long, comfortable farm house of mellowed stone,

with old stone tiles that looked almost golden in the afternoon sun. Some old-fashioned white roses clambered about the wall, and round the green casements. To the right were the farm buildings, partly concealed by a long hedge, an arbour and a splendid peacock cut in yew.

One took these things in at a glance. They were but the background to a young woman with bright red hair lounging in a long chair. There was an open book in her lap, but she was not reading it. She may have been dozing, but as Lady Brassingham's stick tapped on the crazy pavement, she turned, jumped up and came swinging towards us with the long stride of a tall and athletic woman.

"Aunt Anne! You here? Where have you come from? How did you discover me?"

"I didn't. Inspector Frost found you. This is Inspector Frost."

She turned on me impetuously. There was the light of battle in her bright blue eyes, as she asked: "What business was it of yours, or anyone else, where I was? I suppose you haven't come to take me up, like a lost dog."

"I was acting on instructions from Scotland Yard. Your Ladyship will understand that a good many people were alarmed for your safety."

She was going to make a spirited reply when Lady Brassingham intervened, saying: "Dorothy, I should like to sit down."

She led us into the shadow of the peacock, towards the lounge chair. "I prefer one with a stiff back," said Lady Brassingham. Her niece retired into the arbour and returned with two chairs, refusing my offer of assistance. We all then sat down before Lady Dorothy asked: "Tell me how you found out where I was."

"By putting two and two together," I answered. "Several people who did not know where you were gave me unconsciously clues by which I have found you. I may say that I derived much assistance from the innocent prattle of Lady Angela Altamont."

"Little Toad!" said Lady Dorothy, but for the first time she almost smiled.

"She certainly gave me the impression of being an undisciplined child," said Lady Brassingham; "but it was the Mackintosh girl to whom I gave a conduct mark."

"You did what?" exclaimed Lady Dorothy, and she suddenly burst into a peal of merry laughter.

"The Mackintosh girl," said Lady Brassingham severely, "did not regard it as a laughing matter."



"Oh! what has been happening since I left?" gasped Lady Dorothy.

"On Monday," said Lady Brassingham, "I went to Poynings. It was necessary that some responsible person should be in command of the school."

"But Miss Dampier!"

"The Dampier woman didn't like it."

"Oh, I am glad. It was splendid of you."

"That's what that inquisitive child, Letty Boldero, said. When you go back I wish you would smack her."

"My Head Girl! My dear Aunt, she is eighteen."

"She may be, but it would give me great satisfaction if somebody boxed her ears."

Lady Dorothy looked at me, and I looked at her aunt; surprise and irritation had for the moment given place to amusement. There was a certain grimness in the old lady's appearance, leaning on her stick, and no doubt my bulk in that upright chair added to the incongruity of the garden scene.

"To think," said Lady Dorothy, "that Patrick has been scorching into Gloucester on his motor bike these last two days to buy an evening paper, so that we could enjoy the scare headlines about the mysterious disappearance of a school marm, and there was nothing about it."

"Your generation," said Lady Brassingham, "cares for nothing but notoriety."

"No! Aunt Anne. It really wasn't that. We were thinking of the unpleasant notoriety that other people would have when everything came out."

"Most unchristian," said Lady Brassingham. "And very silly! For you would have had to go back sooner or later. How did you mean to support yourself?"

"I have always wanted to do some historical work."

"There's no money in that."

"I meant to make money by writing detective novels."

"You don't know any detectives."

"No more do the other people. I, at any rate, now know Inspector Frost."

"I shall sue your Ladyship for libel if you put me into a novel," said I.

"And it was all so comfortably settled. I have been here several times. Lots of people here know me as Miss Johnson, Patrick's sister. I can't think how Patrick has succeeded in hiding himself successfully for ten years, and that I am discovered in less than a week."

"Nobody was looking for Lord Castlekerry," said I, "or he would soon have been found."

Lord Castlekerry wasn't responsible for the education and well-being of sixty young ladies, and had not a large staff depending on him."

"You sound, Inspector, as if you were always teaching people their duty towards their neighbours."

"Professionally, I am always looking after people who have forgotten that duty."

"I expect most of them," said Lady Brassingham, "were just silly like you."

"Now, my dear Aunt, what was I to do? There was Tony Welman wanting to marry me, and there was his odious mother ready to ruin me if I didn't, and there was Dampier, hand in glove with the Welmans, and wanting the school. I know what they expected of me. A nice little printed letter to all the parents saying that I was retiring on my marriage, but that the school would continue and be conducted on the same lines by my friend, Miss Dampier, who had worked so loyally and efficiently with me ever since the school was opened. Well, I wasn't taking any. Neither was I going to face the bankruptcy court. By disappearing, I was getting them all in a hole. Personally, I think it was quite a smart idea."

"Why didn't you come to me?"

"Well, you see, I have always meant to be independent."

"You might at least have asked my advice. I am your nearest relative, and twice your age. You might also have considered my feelings."

"I didn't know you would have cared so much. I really didn't. I would have come to you if you had not been made of money."

"I am made of flesh and blood," said the old lady, and for a minute I really thought she was going to cry.

"You poor dear!" said Lady Dorothy, rising impulsively and kissing her.

"Well, it's all come right," said Lady Brassingham with a chuckle. "I've settled with Dampier and Wilson, and I am now your only creditor."

"What! You have paid £16,000 on my account?"

"Don't be a fool, Dorothy. I am a woman of business. The Inspector here thinks that he helped me, but I managed everything myself. I made that man Dampier take £10,000 in full payment, and you can go back to Poynings at once."

"Oh, but I can't go back to Poynings. Think how they will all have been talking, and how can I possibly explain?"

"No explanations will be necessary," I said. "Miss Dampier has always announced that you were away for a few days on business, and has pretended that she was fully cognisant of your plans. Of course, none of the staff, nor any of the girls believed her, and they have, I believe, been indulging in the most hair-raising romances, but I wrote to Miss Dampier before leaving that she should tell someone as a great secret that you had been attending the marriage of your brother."

"What! You know that?"

"Of course I do. So you see the explanations will have been accepted before you arrive, and everyone will be saying that Miss Dampier knew all the time, and that it was just like her to make a secret of nothing."

"But Patrick will be awfully angry, and here he comes with Kathleen. Dear me! There are more explanations to come."

Lord Castlekerry, in plus fours and a coat, both of them old, and a shirt open at the throat, suddenly arrived on the lawn with a very pretty dark girl with blue-grey eyes. They came towards us and stopped short with surprise.

"Well, Patrick, I suppose you have not forgotten me, though it is fifteen years since we met."

"I am very glad to see you, Aunt Anne—but it's so unexpected."

"Will you introduce me to Lady Castlekerry?"

"Mrs. Johnson," said Lord Castlekerry.

"It is all up, Patrick, everything is discovered," said Lady Dorothy.

"I might have known I should have no peace when once I got mixed up with your affairs."

"Excuse me," said I. "It was just because you built sand castles at Woolacombe for Lady Angela Altamont that I have been able to trace Lady Dorothy."

Lord Castlekerry turned to me with a puzzled expression.

"Inspector Frost," said Lady Dorothy. "A man from whom nothing can be hid."

"And that naughty child told you about Woolacombe?" said Lady Castlekerry.

"Not me, but my subordinate who was acting as my chauffeur. The young lady, I understand, got up a flirtation with him while hiding from the school authorities."

"It seems about time that I went back to look into things," said Lady Dorothy.

"Thank goodness, here comes tea," said Lady Castlekerry.

A maid servant brought out a table and laid it for tea. Lady Brassingham fastened on to the bride and kept her in conversation. Lady Dorothy sat in the long chair and looked first at her brother and then at me. I was pretty sure that she was laughing to herself. I even thought she might be laughing at us—we were so evidently embarrassed and out of the picture.

Tea was nearly finished, when Lady Brassingham from her high chair looked over the garden wall. Then she got up and said: "Would you mind, my dear, if I lay down for half an hour. I have had a long day and I am returning with Dorothy to Poynings to-night. Patrick, will you show Inspector Frost round the stables or the farm. I told George to get tea in the village and bring the Daimler round at six, so that he may catch the train to Gloucester."

Lady Brassingham spoke with decision, but rather hurriedly, and moved quicker than I had yet seen her do towards the house; she even forgot her stick. Lord Castlekerry rather sulkily opened the gate which led towards the farm buildings. As we left the lawn Major Pickering was coming in at the gate.

## CHAPTER XXXII

## LORD CASTLEKERRY EXPLAINS

LORD CASTLEKERRY walked on into the farm-yard without taking much notice of me, but I ventured a criticism on his shorthorns, and we were soon in animated discussion. I had finally to explain:

"I am a farmer's son, and was bred on the land."

"And gave it up to be a policeman."

"It was only a small farm, and I had a brother."

"What a pity," said Lord Castlekerry; and there have been times when I thought he was right. At the moment I was thinking if it were a pity that "Mr. Johnson" would have to resume his position as a peer of the realm and live perhaps at Poynings Hall in state. He seemed to fit in so well with his present surroundings. I expect he was thinking on similar lines, reviewing his past. He wanted to talk about it. He wanted to justify himself



to himself. He accepted me as an audience because he imagined that I had found out all about him. It was in some ways a relief to talk frankly to a man after concealing his identity for so many years. We were at the moment standing before one of those complicated reaping machines, invented since I was a boy. He said:

"They are more useful in Canada in the great open plains."

"Ah! yes! You went to Canada instead of to Sandhurst in 1917."

"I did. I don't know what you think of me. I rather regret it myself sometimes. I suppose I was wrong. Anyhow at that time I was only proud of being an Irishman, and thought it my duty to hate England." Lord Castlekerry paused for a minute and cut down a nettle with his stick. "The war was a beastly business," he added.

"No doubt," said I, "but the men who went through with it and stuck it out weren't beasts. My only son lies in Flanders, and I feel hot all over when I read the modern war books written by degenerates for degenerates. They are an insult to my boy's memory. Granted they are true, they are only a bit of the truth. We

should never have won the war with such people as they portray."

"You naturally look at the subject from the point of view of one who has lost a son. That's a personal point of view."

"They were all sons of England."

"Just so, and I was an Irishman. I didn't fight, and my reason was personal also. The best pal I have ever had was Franz von Hohenstein, at my prep. school. He spent two summer holidays with me—one at Poynings and one at Castlekerry. I have only known one Frenchwoman, my mother's maid, Josephine. She was what Dorothy used to call a tell-tale-tit. All our nursery troubles could be traced to her. Now I wasn't going to kill young Franz in order that Josephine might go on being a nuisance. You say, What rot; but that's how I argued at the time."

"So you went to Canada."

"Yes, old Trehearne, he was my guardian, fixed up Sandhurst for me, and the exam. in those days was so potty that I could not help passing it. So I slipped away to Liverpool, and was taken on as a steward in a ship sailing for Canada. When I got there I went on a farm."

"I suppose there was no difficulty about that with all the Canadians over this side."

"You need not rub it in, Inspector. Anyhow, life on a Canadian farm out West meant jolly hard work. It was a man's life, it was wholesome, useful work. I am not a shirker, Inspector, and I was not a Conchi in the War."

"Of course not, I said, or you would not have joined the Irish Republican Army."

Lord Castlekerry stopped: "How did you know that? Nobody knows that—not even Dorothy."

"Scotland Yard is very well informed."

"Look here, Inspector, I was only in Ireland six weeks, and never wish to be there again. It was beastly, but the worst chaps were not Irish born. They were gunmen from over the other side. I got away as soon as I could."

"As a squire of Dames?"

"Poor little Kathleen was not much of a dame in those days. She was only eleven. So you know that, too."

"To be quite truthful, I don't—but I should like to hear."

"Then you can apply to Scotland Yard, for I shan't tell you."

We walked on, crossed a couple of fields, and Lord Castlekerry pointed out to me the

limits of the farm. "It's a good farm," he remarked, "and I've put in a lot of work here."

"Yes, there is no doubt it is in good order, and Scotland Yard does not know how you came here."

"It's wonderful to think they don't know everything, and I don't in the least mind telling you. When I came back to England I was three and twenty. So I called on Mr. Trehearne, and realised my patrimony. There was nearly £10,000. A sum like that is no earthly good to a peer of the realm, but it is a very considerable fortune for a man starting as a tenant farmer with some practical experience. That is how I came to settle down here."

"And did you have no trouble in satisfying the natural curiosity of your neighbours?"

"Not at all, I came from Canada, and could talk about it. I was the son of a retired soldier. I have my father's cross and medals in a case over my mantelpiece. They are the only heirlooms which I have, and they are quite genuine. I did not go to the war because of my father's declining health. That is the lie which I am ashamed to say prevails. I had been born in England and gone early to Canada, but had always longed for home and the old country."

Everyone accepted such a story without suspicion."

"And you have prospered?"

"I have had a very happy time. Every now and then I get a day's hunting or shooting. I have some very pleasant neighbours, and I am really keen about my work. Of course I have not made a fortune. You can't if you farm. But if I cleared out to-morrow I should be a little better off than when I started. A large sum would be owing to me for unexhausted improvements."

"It is not so long before you may have to prove that," said Lady Brassingham, who was seated by the hedge we had approached. Then you will have to return to Poynings and scrap all Dorothy's unexhausted improvements."

Lord Castlekerry said nothing, and Lady Brassingham went on: "I came out to find you. The Daimler is in the lane. Good-bye, Inspector, and thank you for all you have done. After all, I must acknowledge you were useful to me this morning."

As we proceeded down the drive Lord Castlekerry said: "That is the only person in the world of whom I am afraid. It began when

I was a kid. She used to descend at intervals on my happy-go-lucky home and put us all to rights. My mother swore by her, and always did what she suggested—at least as long as she remembered—luckily she was Irish and soon forgot. That childish terror came back to me at once when I saw her in the garden this afternoon.”

“I expect she is more mellow than she was, and you are certainly more mature. Has it ever occurred to you that your mother made no mistake when she swore by Lady Brassingham.”

“There was no one like my mother.

Who swore by Lady Brassingham.”

Just as we reached the gate, Major Pickering and Lady Dorothy came up the lane. Had they been to see the Baby Austin, I wonder.

“Hulloh! Castlekerry!”

“You are—yes, you are Pickering.”

“Lady Dorothy has just promised to be my wife, and we want the approval of the head of the family.”

“Then you must just wait until I have seen Inspector Frost off. I can’t cope with too many surprises.”

"I have seen a good deal of Inspector Frost these last two days and am grateful to him."

"You have, have you? He seems to know everyone and everything, and I suppose we all ought to be grateful."

We all said "Good-bye," and, as the chauffeur was getting into his seat, I looked through the window and said, "Give my love to the Lady Angela."

"Little Toad," said Lady Dorothy, but her face was radiant and smiling. There was no doubt now that "Little Toad" belonged to the language of affection.

